

ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR DRUG INFORMATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in December 2019, there has been a lot of information on COVID-19. Moreover, pandemic restrictions and lockdowns have altered access to traditional healthcare practitioners and community pharmacies. These factors made it hard for patients and healthcare workers to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance to deal with the pandemic.

Pharmacists play an important role in providing accurate information regarding COVID-19 disease, prevention and treatment, through pharmaceutical services, such as drug information centers. Drug information centers are crucial in providing scientifically supported and up-to-date information, especially in pandemic.

The National Center for Drug Information (NCDI) was established in 1997 at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Skopje as a public highly professional and informative service available to all citizens and healthcare workers in Republic of North Macedonia.

The core of the center's activities during the COVID-19 pandemic is presenting the latest news and information about the infection, prevention and treatment, by publishing scientifically referenced articles.

This study aims to describe and identify the activities of the NCDI in terms of education and dissemination of accurate and up-to-date information on the COVID-19 pandemic and its acceptance by the public.

Methods

The articles were written in clear and accessible language with easy understanding for the public and disseminated online on the center's official website (www.nfic.ff.ukim.edu.mk) and social media (Facebook).

The number of published articles and the number of visitors reached are used to provide an overview of the center's activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

For the period of January 2020 to April 2022, NCDI published 158 scientifically referenced articles and 5 guidelines related to COVID-19.

❖ SARS-COV 2 and Coronavirus pandemic

33 scientifically referenced articles (20.24 % of all COVID-19 articles) were published containing information about SARS-COV-2 infection, variants, disease symptoms, clinical issues, and immune response.

❖ COVID-19 vaccines

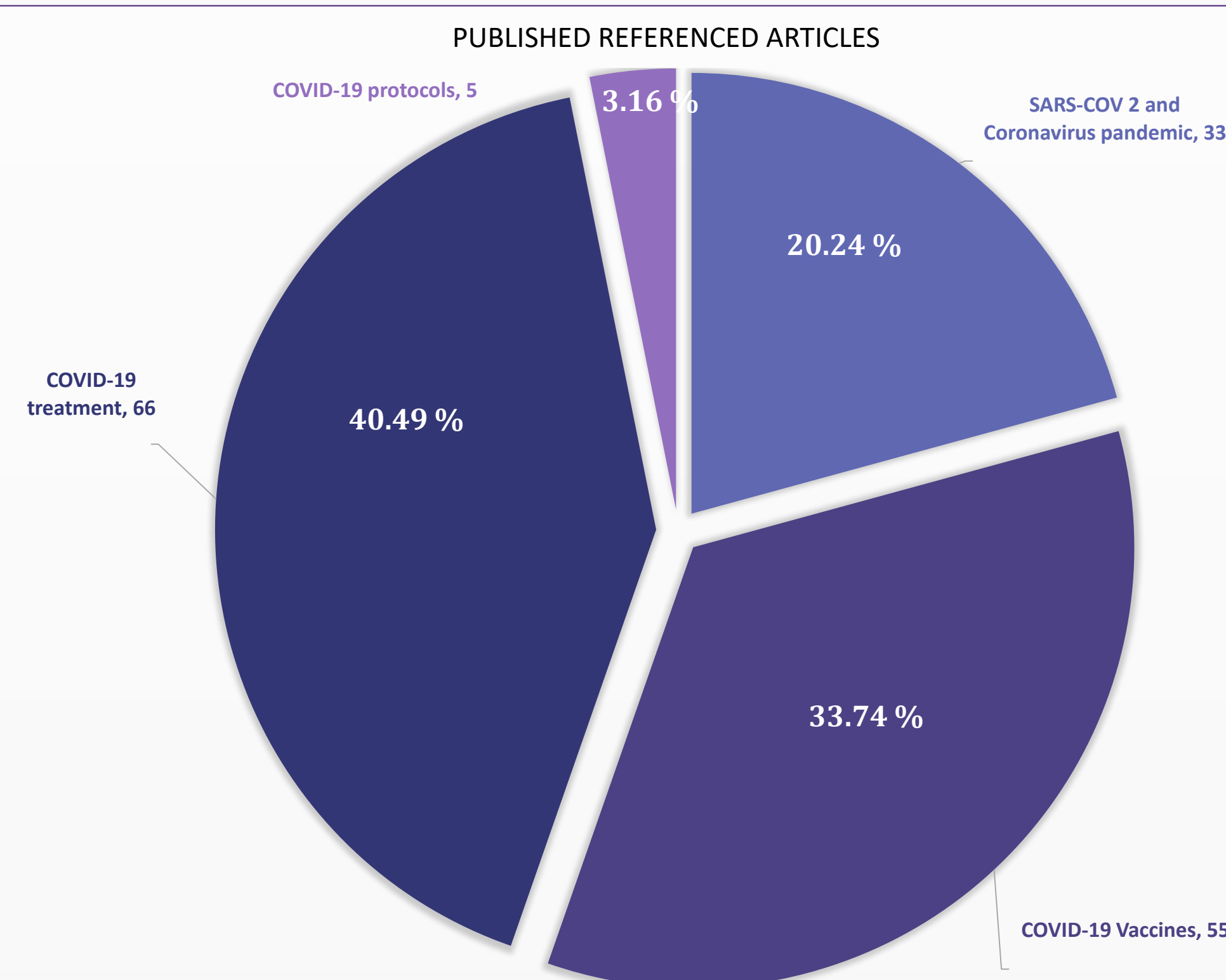
The most commonly published subjects for the 2020/2021 period were on COVID-19 prevention, accounting for 55 referenced articles (33.74 %). Additionally, NCDI disseminated the vaccination campaign which was launched online across Europe by Coalition for Vaccination, reminding that immunization through vaccination is the best protection against serious preventable diseases

❖ COVID-19 treatment

NCDI published 66 (40.49 %) referenced articles related to COVID-19 treatment.

❖ COVID-19 protocols

NCDI published 5 COVID-19 referenced protocols (3.16 %).



The most visited articles were:

❖ SARS-COV 2 and Coronavirus pandemic

The referenced article about IgA, IgM, and IgG response in COVID-19 patients attracted the greatest interest with a total of 7278 visitors.

❖ COVID-19 vaccines

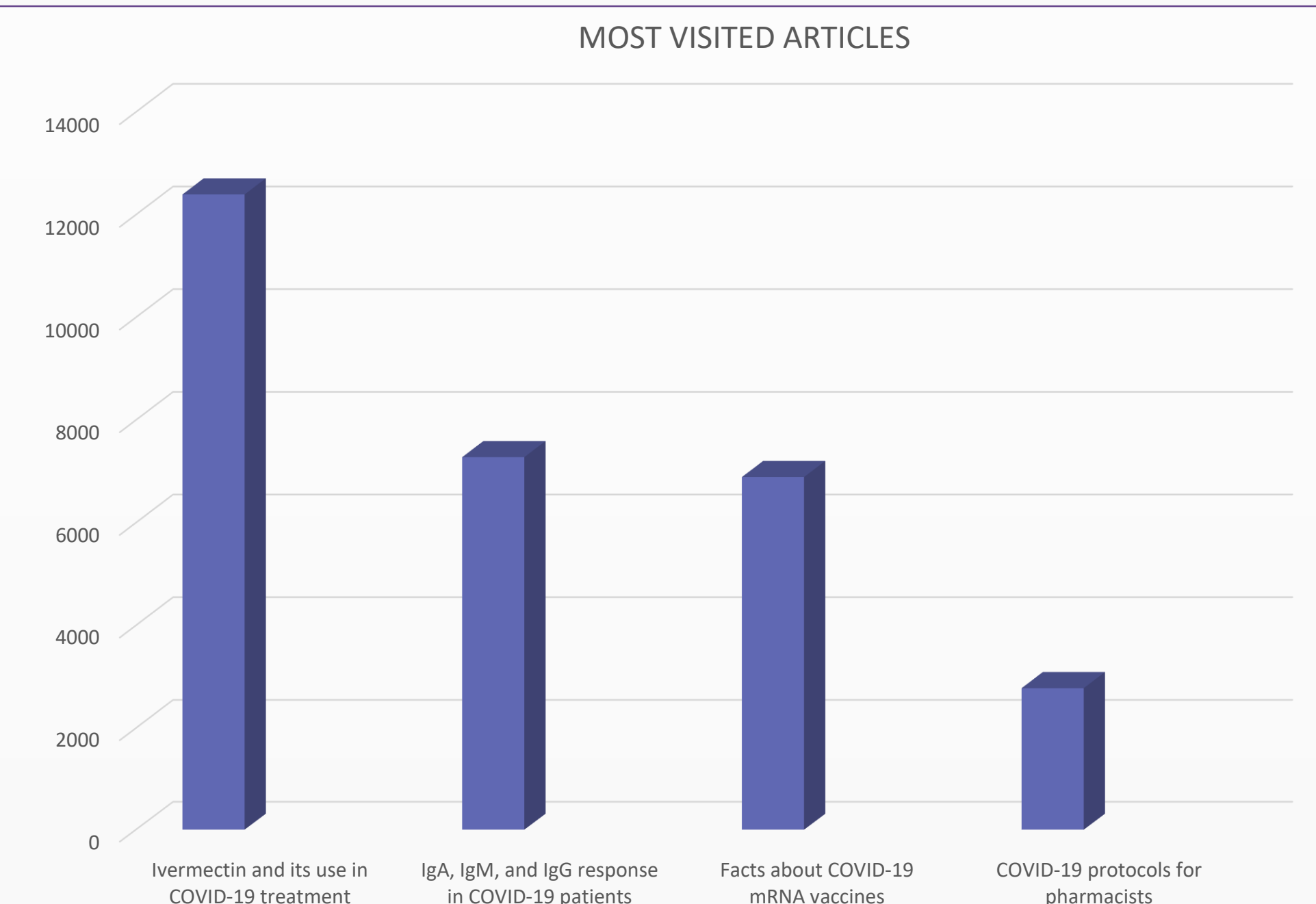
The referenced article "Facts about COVID-19 mRNA vaccines" attracted the greatest interest with a total of 6890 visitors.

❖ COVID-19 treatment

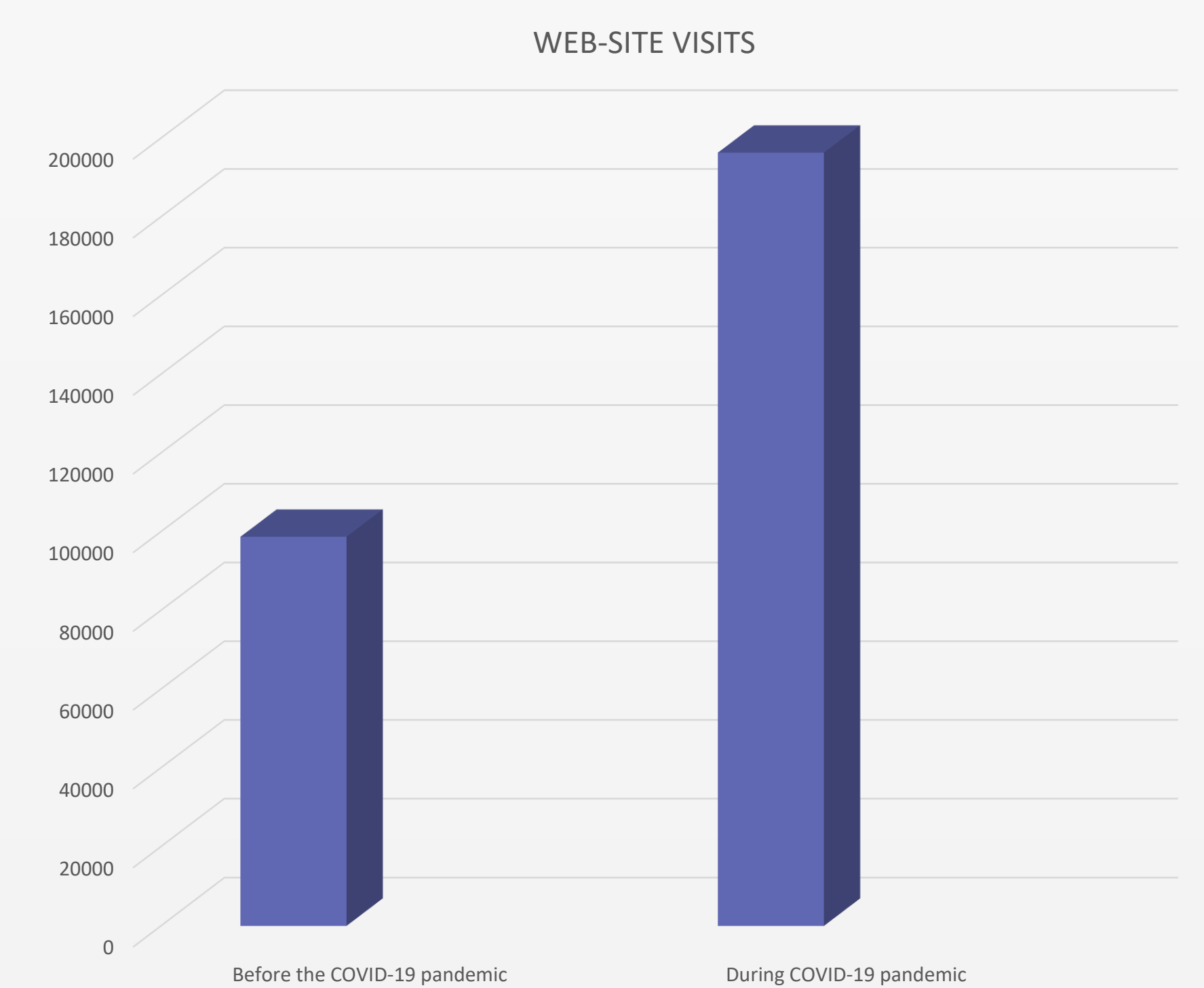
The referenced article "Ivermectin and its use in COVID-19 treatment" attracted the greatest interest with total of 12 395 visitors.

❖ COVID-19 protocols

The most popular was "COVID-19 protocols for pharmacists" with 2778 visitors.



According to available data, the total number of website visits in 2021 was 196310, up from 98.87 % before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (98708 visits).



Discussion

Following the urgent need for prevention, new effective treatment and an increased interest in repurposing of available drugs, healthcare workers and patients face challenging clinical questions. By proactively releasing up-to-date, reliable, and easy-to-understand information, NCDI aims to provide healthcare workers and patients with the most recent clinical trial results and evidence-based information about COVID-19 treatments, increase the public awareness of COVID-19 vaccination and help healthcare workers in delivering facts about vaccines based on scientific evidence. Additionally, NCDI COVID-19 aims to help community pharmacists deal with everyday challenges by publishing referenced COVID-19 protocols.

The significantly increased website traffic during the pandemic period indicates that The National Center for Drug Information, play an important role in providing latest and scientifically based information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

References:

- National Center for Drug Information-NCDI. IgA, IgM and IgG response in patients with COVID-19. Available at: <https://nfic.ff.ukim.edu.mk/jga-igm-i-igg-odgovor-kaj-pacienti-so-covid-19/>. (Last accessed: June 1, 2022)
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