
PATTERNS OF SERVICE USE IN THE ELDERLY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 10/66-DEMENTIA RESEARCH GROUP PREVALENCE STUDY IN PORTUGAL.

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Background: Above 60 years, prevalence rates of neuropsychiatric disorders double with every 5.1 years of age (from 0.7% at 60-65 years to 23.6% for those aged 85 or older). As aged people are dramatically increasing in Portugal, a Country under a serious financial crisis, it is important to understand whether health services are being used appropriately.

Objectives: to characterize the use of health services among the elderly, as part of the implementation of the 10/66-Dementia Research Group Population-based Research Protocol in Portugal.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was implemented of all residents aged 65 or more in a semi-rural area in Southern Portugal. Core evaluation included a cognitive module and the Geriatric Mental State-AGECAT (GDS). A structured questionnaire assessed the use of services, including health care providers (public, private), inpatient episodes, medication and costs.

Results: 703 participants were evaluated. Almost half of the participants (48,9%) were in contact with public primary care facilities, but only 22,5% had a contact with a hospital service. In both settings, nurses and other non-doctor professionals were rarely involved (6,4%) as principal care providers. 11,8% had at least one contact with a private providers. Inpatient episodes in the last 3 months were very infrequent (3%). The National Health Service covered most costs.

Conclusions: Previous research strongly suggests that health services are not provided equitably to people with mental disorders, namely the elderly. Reliable and cross-culturally comparable information about patterns of care may guide the implementation of adequate management in this area in Portugal.