



STUDYING PATTERNS OF AMBULATORY CARE FOR THE ELDERLY THROUGH A RESEARCH NETWORK OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS IN GERMANY

Elke Raum, Martin Schlaud, Ulla Walter, Friedrich Wilhelm Schwartz
Medical School Hanover, Department of Epidemiology, Social Medicine and Health System Research, Hanover, Germany

Objective

The objective of this ongoing study is to examine associations between diagnostic strategies or therapeutic patterns of ambulatory medical care and patient age. Potential differences between rural and urban regions in Germany are also considered.

Material and Methods

A representative sample of 574 office-based general practitioners was randomly selected from 1491 office-based general practitioners in the northwest of Lower-Saxony, a northern state of Germany (see Figure 1b).

Areas that can be described as rural for Germany are included in this study region (see Table 1).

Out of 574 physicians invited by letter to participate, 278 (48.4%) responded and 151 initially agreed to participate. 116 are still recruiting patients into the study.

Patients with acute abdominal pain or known heart disease (heart failure / CHD) are eligible to be recruited.

The sampling frame for patients is stratified for age groups (five 10-year intervals from 50 years onwards) and sex.

The observation period has started October 1, 1999 and will end September 30, 2000.

A standardized form, obtaining information on diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, is completed by participating doctors on each consultation of study patients.

Residential zip codes of both physicians and patients are also obtained in order to distinguish between rural and urban areas.

Results

Since October 1, 1999 5281 patient contacts have been documented.

The average number of inhabitants per km² is 230. The distribution of the study physicians according urban and rural areas is shown in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Four hundred and ten patients with acute abdominal pain (233 women and 177 men) and 581 patients with known heart disease (296 women and 285 men) have been recruited so far. The age distribution of this patients is shown in Figure 3 and 4.

Conclusion

So far, data on patterns of ambulatory care for elderly patients with respect to age and regional differences are not available for Germany. First preliminary results of this ongoing study indicate that a research network of office-based general practitioners as an approach to the served population is an adequate way to obtain this kind of information because general practitioners are the group of physicians first and mainly consulted by elderly patients.

More detailed results will be available after the end of the observation period.

Figure 1a: Europe



Figure 1b: Study region in Lower Saxony, Germany

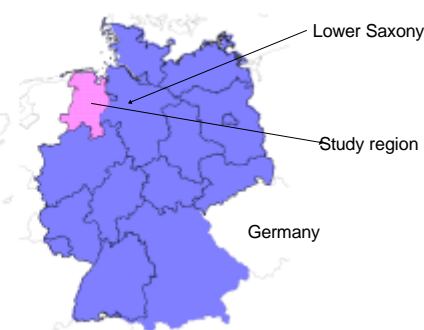


Figure 2: Distribution of study physicians by urban and rural areas

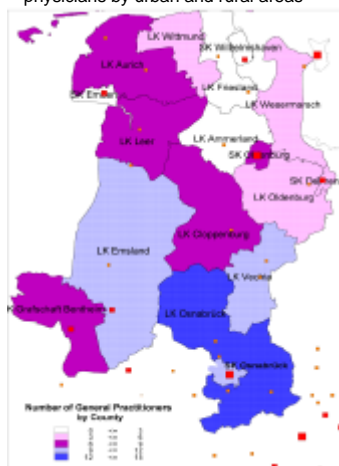


Table 1: Inhabitants per km² and distribution of study physicians by urban and rural areas

Urban areas	Inhabitants per km ²	Number of Physicians
SK Delmenhorst	1.255	4
SK Emden	459	3
SK Oldenburg	1.489	8
SK Osnabrück	1.392	12
SK Wilhelmshaven	866	0
Rural Areas		
LK Ammerland	145	3
LK Aurich	142	9
LK Cloppenburg	102	8
LK Emsland	103	12
LK Friesland	163	2
LK Grafsch. Bentheim	130	9
LK Leer	144	8
LK Oldenburg	108	6
LK Osnabrück	164	13
LK Vechta	149	10
LK Wesermarsch	115	5
LK Wittmund	85	4

Figure 3: Distribution of study patients by age and sex, acute abdominal pain

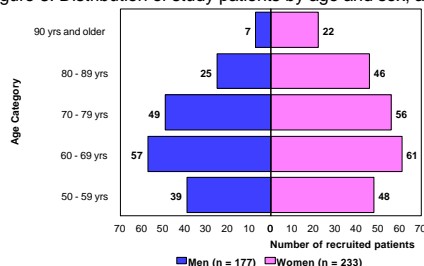


Figure 4: Distribution of study patients by age and sex, known heart disease

