

13th Annual Meeting of the International Society of Technology Assessment in Health Care (ISTAHC). Barcelona, Spain, 1997.

Needs and access: the case of mammography in Spain.

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Abstract

Purpose: Experts generally agree that periodic mammography is necessary for women within a certain age group. The purpose of the present investigation was to study access to mammography among Spanish women and to identify related factors. Women were considered to have access if they had received a mammogram in the last 2 years.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted in April 1994 in a nationally representative sample of 2,986 women aged 40-70. Data were collected by personal interview on the dependent variable (access to mammography) and the independent variables (region of residence and women's characteristics potentially related to access). Information on other independent variables, such as existence of breast cancer screening programs in the woman's province of residence and the relative wealth index of each autonomous community was collected from official institutions or existing publications. Data were analyzed using a multi-level model to estimate the effect of women's characteristics and region on access to mammography.

Results: Twenty eight percent of Spanish women aged 40-70 years had received at least one mammogram in the previous 2 years. The multi-level model showed a significant association between women's characteristics and access to mammography (pseudo Z values $> \pm 2$). The variables most strongly associated with access were visits to the gynecologist (estimates = 2.33 for 1-3 visits; 2.78 for >3 visits) and existence of a breast cancer screening program (estimates = 1.69 for total coverage). Region explains a significant amount of the remaining variation in the model (pseudo Z = 2.04).

Conclusions: There is a general agreement that women aged 40-70 should receive a mammogram every 2 years. However, less than one third of them receive the procedure in Spain. Gynecologist visits and breast cancer screening programs are the factors most strongly associated with access to mammography. Further studies are needed of factors at regional level affecting access to mammography. Sound research should be done for understanding the key factors that affect access to necessary procedures.

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