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The structural cost of the medical libraries in Spain

Sánchez C, Lázaro P*, Poza MA, Estrada JM.

Health Services Research Unit, Instituto de Salud Carlos III, Madrid, Spain.

Abstract

Objective: To analyze the cost of medical libraries in Spain as a first step in analyzing their efficiency.

Methods: Cross sectional study of the following public centers: hospitals >100 beds, or smaller with teaching accreditation; health administration centers; health research centers; schools of public health; schools of medicine and dentistry; and schools of nursing and physical therapy. Selected centers were asked if they had a library according to the following operational definition: "Organized collection of books and periodic publications in the health sciences, with at least one person who facilitates the use of such documents in a specific physical area." A questionnaire was mailed to the identified libraries and followed up by telephone. Data collection was completed in 1996. Annual cost data refer to the year 1994.

Results: Of the 716 centers surveyed, only 400 (56%) had a library. The questionnaire was answered by 302 libraries (response rate: 75.5%). The estimated annual cost for these 302 libraries was \$41.5 million (US\$1=131 Pts.) which, extrapolated to all 400 libraries, controlling for type of library, amounts to \$53.2 million (base case). As some costs were measured and others estimated, a sensitivity analysis was performed by increasing and decreasing the estimated values by 20%. With this technique, the actual cost of the medical libraries in Spain could range from \$45.5 million (best case) to \$60.8 million (worst case). Personnel costs make up the largest proportion of the total cost (43%), followed by acquisition of books and periodicals (23%). Some structural deficits were observed (e.g., only 55% had a photocopy machine, 26% a fax machine, and 22% a modem). The 211 hospital libraries (53% of the system) represented 45% of the total cost, the 99 health administration centers (25% of the system) represented 17%, and the 27 schools of medicine and dentistry (7% of the system) made up 21% of the total cost. The cost of the Spanish health documentation system is approximately 0.15 - 0.2% of total national health expenditures.

Conclusions: The cost of the Spanish health documentation system represents a small fraction of the national health expenditures. Hospital libraries produce the largest proportion of the cost of the Spanish health documentation system, followed by medical and dental school libraries. Some centers lacking library facilities need to incorporate them, and many libraries suffer from structural deficits which hamper their efficiency. Additional resources will be required to remedy these defects.

* Current Address: Pablo Lázaro y de Mercado. Técnicas Avanzadas de Investigación en Servicios de Salud (TAISS). Cambrils 41-2, 28034, Madrid, Spain. E-mail: plazaro@taiss.com.