

Abstract

Geographical Approach to the Demand and Supply of Health Care Services

The main goal of this research is to establish the potential contribution of geographic science to the building up of a modern and global concept of healthcare, by integrating input from human populations' disease status contributing factors.

The first four chapters present a detailed bibliographic revision on the *Geography of Health* theme, from its more traditional approaches to culturally focused contributions, namely in the mental health area.

Chapters five and six discuss a set of data analysis techniques commonly applied to health geography issues which will be central to the empirical part of this work. A discussion focused on the role of the variable 'space' in the understanding of a disease's epidemiology – illustrated with the example of HIV/Aids – is put forward to substantiate a conceptual approach to the problematic of space in health and disease.

The empirical part of this work is centred on a geographic and epidemiologic reading of HIV/Aids mortality in the years 1991-2001, using standardised mortality rates and empirical Bayes estimations.

Hospital data, regarding the admission of HIV/Aids infected in-patients to *Hospital da Universidade de Coimbra's* Infectious Diseases Service between the years of 1996-2001 has been evaluated taking into account both socio-demographic characterization and spatial delimitation of demand. A set of direct and indirect HIV/Aids associated costs which by far surpass the loss of human life have been assessed and have sustained some conclusions:

- Health prevention policies, particularly those related to STD should take into account a series geographically projected 'high risk situations';
- 40 per cent of the demand for HIV/Aids related healthcare is external to the hospital's 'influence area';
- The HIV/Aids healthcare user profile of this sample is predominantly composed of low qualification and low income individuals;
- Similarly to international examples the average patient/year cost has been reduced following the adoption of HAART;

- The adoption of HAART is – on a medium term analysis – associated with a reduction in the frequency of demand for HIV/Aids related healthcare;
- A reduction of admitted HIV patients' mortality rate was recorded thus accompanying similar results obtained in international studies.