

PRACTICE OBSERVED

Practice Research

Effect of distance from surgery on consultation rates in an urban practice

CARL R. WHITEHOUSE

Abstract
Introducing a microcomputer into a general practice provides an opportunity to consider how different population groups use the services offered...

Introduction
The results of surveys of patients have shown that there is a high level of satisfaction with the accessibility of general practitioner services...

distance from the surgery may be compensated by a close, long term relationship with a doctor.

When Ritchie et al looked at reported frequency of consultation, however, they found a small decrease effect of distance...

Few studies have been done from general practice using a doctor's list of patients to consider the effect of distance on the consultation rate...

Having a practice information system on computer in one urban practice, where nearly a fifth of patients lived two or more miles from the health centre...

Method

The practice has one full time and two part time principals working from a health centre in an inner city area...

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the higher proportion who had had cervical cancer (usually at a local authority clinic) may reflect the availability of other clinics than the health centre...

TABLE 1—Six month consultation rate by age and sex for all registered patients

Table with 3 columns for Age group (Under 15, 15-24, 25-44, 45-64, 65+) and 6 columns for Sex (Male, Female, Total). Rows show consultation rates for different years.

TABLE 2—Six month consultation rate by social class (Oxley rates based on 3888 consultations with 1622 patients of known social class)

Table with 3 columns for Social class (I, II, III, IV, V) and 6 columns for Sex (Male, Female, Total). Rows show consultation rates for different years.

TABLE 3—Information from computer on long term medical and social problems, prevention, and repeat prescriptions

Table with 3 columns for Age group (15-24, 25-44, 45-64) and 6 columns for Sex (Male, Female, Total). Rows show various statistics like percentage of women aged 15-44 requiring contraceptive care...

Discussion

In the practice the patients who live furthest from the surgery had less contact with their general practitioners. This is not explained by age or by social class...

An alternative explanation is that patients who live in the inner area are associated with unemployment, substandard accommodation, and other aspects of social deprivation...

perhaps for certain groups, such as young or single persons, the health centre is looked on as an easily accessible place to receive support that is not otherwise available from other agencies...

TABLE 4—Six month consultation rate by age and sex for all registered patients

Table with 3 columns for Age group (Under 15, 15-24, 25-44, 45-64, 65+) and 6 columns for Sex (Male, Female, Total). Rows show consultation rates for different years.

TABLE 5—Six month consultation rate by social class (Oxley rates based on 3888 consultations with 1622 patients of known social class)

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TABLE 6—Information from computer on long term medical and social problems, prevention, and repeat prescriptions

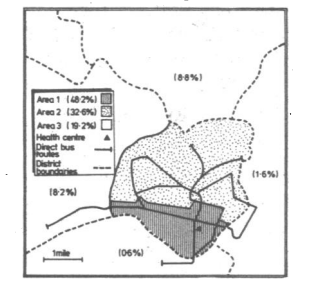
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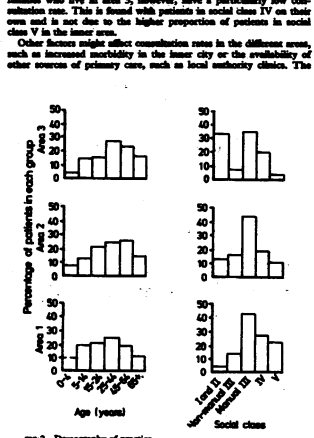
In 1983 a BMDS GP20 Computer System was installed (with help from the Department of Industry/Departments of Health and Social Security's scheme Computer for general practitioners)...



Area 3 consists of three areas of metropolitan Solihull not included in the city before 1974, as well as parts of the practice lying in other boroughs...

Registration details and clinical and social information were loaded on to the computer by December 1983. Occupation, when known, was recorded by the Registrar General's classification...

Such a variation might be an artefact, as figure 2 shows that the area has different distributions by age and social class. It might, however, when these factors are standardized, and table 11 and 111, show the trend for most age groups and social classes with some differences among groups...



computer maintains a disease register of long term medical and social problems and also records preventive measures, such as cervical screening and blood pressure measurements, and the latest repeat prescriptions (see Table IV).

Table 11—Comparison by area for six months. Table with 3 columns for Area (1, 2, 3) and 6 columns for Sex (Male, Female, Total). Rows show various statistics like percentage of women aged 15-44 requiring contraceptive care...

perception of the role of general practice and shows the need to consider the use of general practitioner services in the context of all primary care services. This analysis also highlights certain groups where low consultation rates provide little opportunity to receive support that is not otherwise available from other agencies...

Data from a computer on different uses can inform decision and add greatly to the insights gained from large studies of populations. Groups that require further research into reasons for low or high usage (taking into account patients' perceptions of their needs) may be isolated. Such research may also suggest

more appropriate responses by the whole primary health care team. I thank Dr J. R. Clyne and Dr J. Robinson for the opportunity to carry out the study in their practice, and the staff of the DHEC Urban Practice Care Unit for their comments, and to Miss J. Hollingford for secretarial help.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Sir—A special commission is about to be held, to take into consideration the progress of commerce since the year 1884, and the best means to be adopted to diminish the loss of life at sea; but it appears to me that one most important branch of the subject is very likely to be entirely overlooked and ignored...

preached, and that the last-mentioned cause of death, and of its quality. The conditions that nearly always prevailed were, first, a long and often wrong passage; and second, a nearly total deprivation of vegetable food...

The Medical Commission, which is about to make a sanitary survey of England to prevent against cholera, would do well to inquire into the overlooked health-conditions of the railway men out of London. The first point to be considered is the sanitary conditions of the railway men...