GEOGRAPHICAL DISPARITIES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF BOARD CERTIFIED CARDIOLOGISTS AND ONCOLOGISTS IN MISSISSIPPI

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Abstract: Cardiovascular disease and cancer are the number 1 and 2 killers of Americans. This phenomenon is also true for Mississippi, with the State ranking first and fifth in the nation for CVD and cancer mortality, respectively. In the year 2000, 11,792 Mississippians died from CVD. In 2001, 6,100 Mississippians died from cancer. In 1998, $26.4 billion in payments were made to Medicare beneficiaries for hospital expenses due to cardiovascular problems. That was an average of $7,937 per discharge. In 2000, the National Institutes of Health estimated the cost of cancer was $180.2 billion. The literature suggests that insurance status and barriers to health care may contribute to the economic burden of CVD and cancer in the US. Availability and access to trained practitioners by patients is one barrier to healthcare that has received little or no attention. This barrier is the focus of this research. The objectives of this study were to examine: 1) the distribution of physicians and board certified cardiologists and medical oncologists in the U.S.; 2) disparities in CVD and cancer mortality in Mississippi as it relates to board certified cardiologists; and 3) disparities in CVD and cancer mortality in Mississippi as it relates to physicians and board certified cardiologists and medical oncologists. Secondary data was obtained from the following sources: U.S. Census, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, American Board of Medical Specialists Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists (2006 edition), Physician Characteristics and Distribution in the U.S. (2006 edition) and the Mississippi Department of Health. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and Kruskal-Wallis test were the methods of statistical analysis. Rates were computed per 100,000 persons. The rate of cardiologists is positively and significantly correlated with that of physicians (p<0.05). The number of cardiologists per 100,000 persons in the 9 Mississippi public health districts and the mortality rates for total CVD were negative and significantly correlated (p<0.05). Median income was positively and significantly correlated with the rate of cardiologists (p<0.05). Approximately 74% of the counties in Mississippi have no cardiologists. Similarly, 77% of the counties in Mississippi have no certified medical oncologists. Approximately 31% of all certified medical oncologist and 26% of cardiologists in the State are located in Jackson, Hinds County. There is definitely disparities in the distribution of board certified cardiologists and medical oncologists in Mississippi. Thus, availability and easy access to well-trained healthcare providers should be critically evaluated when examining access to care. In the era of bridging the gap in disparities in the health status of citizens, new paradigms are needed to address the elimination of health disparities.

Keywords: Access to care, health disparities, cardiologists, medical oncologists, Mississippi, cancer, cardiovascular disease, healthcare providers, Medicare.