

NEWS

Primary care in Spain is underfunded and unattractive, says report

Aser García Rada

Madrid

Primary care in Spain is suffering from the double indignity of being underfunded and overlooked by health professionals and patients, says a joint report from public health specialists and groups representing primary care doctors and nurses.

The report, from the Spanish Society of Public Health and Health Administration (SESPAS), is the first joint analysis by a collaboration of the country's three societies of primary care physicians (SEMFyC, SEMERGEN, and SEMG) and the society of primary care nurses (Asociación de Enfermería Comunitaria). It consists of 24 articles by 68 experts and is published as a supplement of the journal *Gaceta Sanitaria* (2012;26(suppl 1)).

Speaking at a press conference in Madrid on 20 March, María Dolores Fuiza, president of SESPAS, said that the report's aim was to help "politicians make the right decisions."

Primary care has been underfunded "by act or omission" for the past three decades, says the report. This has made it unattractive to citizens, who are increasingly demanding to see hospital specialists rather than relying on their GP, and to medical students, more of whom are choosing hospital specialties over general practice.

"We do not teach medical students about the social determinants of health," Fuiza said. "We train doctors with the aim to become [hospital] specialists, generally in high technology [areas]."

Of the total healthcare budget, 54% is spent on hospital and other secondary care specialist services, while only 16% is dedicated to primary care, where around 70% of care is provided. Between 1984 and 2008 the total healthcare budget rose by 24% more than that for primary care, the report says.

The editors highlight an article by Barbara Starfield, of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, which she wrote before her

death in 2011 (*Gaceta Sanitaria* 2012;26(suppl 1):20-6), showing that health outcomes improve with better primary care.

Another article by Juan Simó, of the Rochapea primary health centre, Pamplona, and Juan Gervás, coordinator of the CESCA (Correlación entre las Entradas y las Salidas en la Consulta Ambulatoria) team for research and education in primary care and another of the supplement's editors (*Gaceta Sanitaria* 2012;26(suppl 1):36-40), says that public sector primary care is being marginalised because the most informed, demanding, and influential citizens "escape" from it by using private healthcare.

Francisco Hernandezanz, a GP of the Norte de Sabadell primary care team, Sabadell, Catalonia, and a supplement editor, said that Spain needed an open debate on the terms of employment for primary care doctors. Most doctors working in Spain's public sector are civil servants, but self employment initiatives launched over recent years in Catalonia have broadened professional involvement and increased patients' satisfaction, Hernandezanz explained.

The report also highlights Spaniards' increasing use of drugs, from an average 17.3 prescriptions per person in 2005 to 20.4 in 2010. Spain currently holds the "world silver medal" for numbers of prescriptions, second after the United States.

Informe SESPAS 2012: La atención Primaria: evidencias, experiencias y tendencias en clínica, gestión y política sanitaria (SESPAS' Report 2012. Primary Care: Evidence, Experience and Trends in Clinical Management and Health Policy) is available at www.elsevier.es/es/revistas/gaceta-sanitaria-138/volumen-26/numero-supl1.

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