

Ambulatory Care Utilization of Individuals with Cerebral Palsy in Taiwan- A Country with Universal Coverage and No Gatekeeper Regulation

Authors : Ming-Juei Chang, Hui-Ing Ma, Tsung-Hsueh Lu

Abstract : Introduction: Because of the advance of medical care (e.g., ventilation techniques and gastrostomy feeding), more and more children with CP can live to adulthood. However, little is known about the use of health care services from children to adults who have CP. The patterns of utilization of ambulatory care are heavily influenced by insurance coverage and primary care gatekeeper regulation. The purpose of this study was to examine patterns of ambulatory care utilization among individuals with CP in Taiwan, a country with universal coverage and no gatekeeper regulation. Methods: A representative sample of one million patients (about 1/23 of total population) covered by Taiwan's National Health Insurance was used to analyze the ambulatory care utilization in individuals with CP. Data were analyzed by 3 different age groups (children, youth and adults) during 2000 to 2003. Participants were identified by the presence of CP diagnosis made by pediatricians or physicians of physical and rehabilitation medicine and stated at least three times in claims data. Results: Annual rates of outpatient physician visits were 31680 for children, 16492 for youth, and 28617 for adults with CP (per 1000 persons). Individuals with CP received over 50% of their outpatient care from hospital outpatient department. Higher use of specialist physician services was found in children (54.7%) than in the other two age groups (28.4% in youth and 18.8% in adults). Diseases of respiratory system were the most frequent diagnoses for visits in both children and youth with CP. Diseases of the circulatory system were the main reasons (24.3%) that adults with CP visited hospital outpatient care department or clinics. Conclusion: This study showed different patterns of ambulatory care utilization among different age groups. It appears that youth and adults with CP continue to have complex health issues and rely heavily on the health care system. Additional studies are needed to determine the factors which influence ambulatory care utilization among individuals with CP.

Keywords : cerebral palsy, health services, lifespan, universal coverage

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