

World Health Report 2000: Health system performance

The *World Health Report 2000* is a review by the WHO of the world's health systems performance.¹ It makes sobering reading for South Africans!

South Africa's overall health system performance was ranked 175 out of 191 countries. The best country was France, the UK was 18 and the USA stood at 37 on the list. The worst country was Sierra Leone at 191. What is surprising is how badly South Africa performed in this global competition. Most African countries were in the last quarter of the list.

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Performance was measured in two ways: on the functions of service delivery, the creation of resources (investment and training), stewardship and financing (collecting, pooling and purchasing), and on the objectives of responsiveness by the health care system to people's expectations, fair financial contribution and good health of the population.

South Africa's health system measured poorly in the following areas of responsiveness to people's expectations: promptness of service delivery, choice of service provider, respect of patients and institutional autonomy.

For radiologists, an interesting comparison was the health care input mix in middle-income countries like South Africa, Thailand, Mexico and Egypt. Health care input mix is a measure of the financial resources invested in high technology such as MR and CT scanners, finance spent on hospital beds and finance spent on training of physicians and nurses. The authors' comment on South Africa is that it is "at the maximum of the group of middle income countries for expenditure on health care, nurses, hospital beds and MR scanners, while it is the furthest from the maximum for drugs and physicians".

What does this all mean in a global perspective? We are classified by the World Bank as a middle-income country. Our gross national product per capita in 1998 was USD3 310, making us the 83rd richest country in the world!² We spend close to 8,5% of our gross domestic product (GDP) on health care, which compares well with other middle-income countries: 6% in Hungary, 3% in Malaysia and 4,7% in Chile, all of which have better performing health systems.³

What is apparent is that we are not getting value for money in our health care system investment in South Africa. Now that our health system performance has been measured for the first time using international norms, we know where we stand in the international rankings. We also know we have to do better.

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Editor

References

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2. *World Bank Atlas 2000.* Washington: World Bank (www.worldbank.org).
3. McIntyre D, Bloom G, Doherty J, Brijlal P. *Health expenditure and finance in South Africa.* Durban: Health Systems Trust & World Bank, 1993 (www.hst.org.za/pubs/hstefsa/heftoc.htm).