

Availability of medical services in the EU countries

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One of the important elements in determining the level of social development of the country and the quality of life of its inhabitants is an analysis of the availability of medical services. Appropriate availability of medical services in the country based on the needs of its inhabitants is therefore one of the most important issues which has to be solved by the contemporary health policy.

The availability of medical services in the field of specialised health care affects mainly the amount of human and physical resources (infrastructure and medical personnel), in a health care system of each European country. Lack of these resources may be the cause of a reduction of the number of medical services and, as a consequence, the increase in the health problems of the population of the country. A particular problem for the organizers of the health care system may be territorial inequalities in the distribution of facilities, infrastructure and medical staff, as well as inequalities in access to these resources by different social groups.

Access to medical services differs across Europe. Differences in funding and reimbursement systems create barriers for the adoption of innovative medical technology, new hospitals and equipment. The aim of the study is to analyze the availability of medical services in selected EU countries, especially to present the state of physical resources in the hospitals in the years 2001-2011. Particular attention is paid to the amount and structure of the hospitals operating in each EU country, the number and structure of hospital beds and medical technology. There are also used two indicators to measure the capacity of the European hospitals: the length of stay for curative and inpatient care and the occupancy rate for curative (acute) care beds. The problem of availability of medical services in analyzed UE countries is shown on the background of the average for the EU.

Key words: availability of medical services, hospitals, healthcare systems, number of hospital beds, length of stay for inpatient care, curative care bed occupancy rate