

PS2.191

The increase in healthy life years in Portugal - a comparison with Norway

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Background & Aim: The healthy life years after 65 years correspond to the number of years that a person with 65 years can expect to live healthy. According to the European Commission, Portuguese people have an average of 6 and 6.6 years of healthy life after 65 years for males and females respectively, which is significantly low when compared to Norway (15.9 and 15.4 years for males and females respectively). Both health systems presuppose universal health access, but these two countries grow apart in what concerns to health public expense which is about 6.1% of GDP for Portugal and 8.9% of GDP for Norway. Alongside this difference, in Portugal certain diseases are more frequent and have higher mortality rates such as Diabetes Mellitus (DM). The DM prevalence and its percentage of the health budget is 4.7% and 6% in Norway and 13% and 8% in Portugal. The question that arises is what can Portugal do to reach similar values to Norway?

Method: Review of literature.

Results: Norway has a strong primary care system which minimizes the hospital admissions of chronic diseases as DM. Furthermore, out-of-pocket payments are significantly low compared with Portugal. Norway has been doing a great effort since 1970 in order to promote healthy lifestyle and to strengthen the primary care system. Its promotion is multifaced and the measures include incentives, education actions, regulations, health programs and nutrition policies.

Conclusions: All measures implemented by Norway have contributed to decrease DM prevalence and consequently to the increase in healthy life years for Norwegians. Portugal's commitment to primary health care may result in increased costs in the short term as it will entail a restructuring, but in the long run will result in a costs' reduction and maybe it is the path to increase healthy life years after 65 years.