

The Healthcare System Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic: Epidemiological and Financial Perspectives*

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged unexpectedly in early 2020, presented a formidable challenge to health systems worldwide. No country was adequately prepared for such a threat arising from a previously unknown pathogen. Throughout the pandemic, numerous publications emerged that examined the transformations within health systems resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature highlighted the impact of health policy on health system operations, particularly in guaranteeing access to diagnostics and treatment, optimising the system's capability to manage the rapidly increasing number of infected individuals, and utilising digital solutions for patient contact. The overall health condition induced by the pandemic of each nation was analysed in terms of life expectancy, population health, health disparities, health investment, and the readiness of health systems for future emergencies. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on the financing of healthcare care, noting the reduction in health premium revenues due to rising unemployment and the financial risk assumed by public payers, which subsequently modified payment mechanisms. The academic literature reveals an apparent deficiency in employing a cross-disciplinary methodology when evaluating the performance of health systems, particularly with regard to the epidemiological and financial implications of the pandemic. Furthermore, there exists a scarcity of publications that encompass the duration of the pandemic, rather than focussing on specific individual years.

The aim of this article is to examine the epidemiological conditions that define pandemic periods and to evaluate the transformations that occur within health systems in countries of the European Union in terms of the extent and structure of health expenditures. To achieve the objectives of this study, inductive reasoning-based research methodologies were used, which included review of the literature, analysis of health reports, exploration of online resources and examination of accessible databases. Based on data extracted from the sources mentioned above, secondary research was carried out, which included a comprehensive analysis of the epidemiological, health and economic conditions of the European Union countries in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic period was characterised by an increase in mortality rates and an incidence of excess deaths. In 2021, the epidemiological situation reached its lowest point, with the average mortality rate among people infected with SARS-CoV-2 at 10.5%, and 11 countries experienced mortality rates above the norm. Within the study time frame, excess deaths were observed in 17 out of 27 nations in the EU, and the number of excess deaths exceeded the reported death figures from COVID-19 by 22%. The analysis illustrates a link between the pandemic and increased health expenditures. In the years 2020 and 2021, there was a substantial rise to 9.2% of GDP and 9.3% of GDP, which previously averaged around 8.2% of GDP. A fluctuation in the scale of health expenditures is evident in the analysis of per capita spending, which exhibited an average annual growth of 8% and 13%, respectively, during the pandemic period.

Keywords: COVID-19, sars-cov-2, excess deaths, health financing