


Chapter 14

Complexity of Individual Choice Between the Public and Private Healthcare Sectors

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes what leads one individual to choose a particular health care institution, its main factors of valuation, their level of satisfaction as users, and the factors of complexity in their choice process, in Portugal. This work will compare public and private institutions and characterize the users of both types of health institutions. The explanatory variables for choosing between public or private sector health care institutions are (1) complexity factors in accessing health care services, (2) individual's attitude toward the health, (3) quality of service and e-service, (4) effectiveness of treatment, (5) price fairness, and (6) institution's perceived quality. This information was collected through an online structured questionnaire and a quantitative methodology was applied. Results show that while overall service quality has a positive and significant influence on public and private health care institutions, choice difficulty shows a negative and significant influence.

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INTRODUCTION

This study aims to understand what leads the population to choose a particular health care institution, the main factors for valuing it and their level of satisfaction as users. It also intends to understand if institutions' strategies used at the management level are well developed and if they meet the users' needs.

This study will compare public and private institutions, characterize the users of both types of health care institutions and identify which specialties are more frequent in these institutions. Also, and as the main objective, to know what leads individuals to choose a type of institution and the complexity factors in their choice process. To this end, a set of variables was used: (i) complexity factors in the access to health services, (ii) service quality and e-service, (iii) effectiveness of the treatment, (iv) price fairness, and (v) perceived quality of the institution.

BACKGROUND

Importance of Health Versus Specificities of the Health Sector

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease” (cited by Infopédia, 2021). It further argues that health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being regardless of race, religion, political belief and/or social and economic status. The WHO reports that the population's health is fundamental to the peace and security of the population and that it depends on cooperation between individuals and states. Therefore, governments are responsible for ensuring their population's health and providing appropriate health and social measures. The issue of health is a relevant aspect for all, and according to Campos and Simões (2011), health is nowadays an essential part of citizenship.

Esteves (2010) makes the distinction that health does not refer only to physical well-being but to a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not only to the absence of disease or illness. Nevertheless, health serves as both cause and consequence of well-being, i.e., in the absence of good health, it is difficult to affirm a state of well-being. Otherwise, many components of well-being are themselves determinants of health status.

According to Bezerra and Sorpreso (2016), health is the greatest resource for social, economic, and personal development and an important dimension of quality of life. This idea is corroborated in the Portuguese Ministry of Health's 2018 document – Portrait of Health, where it is posited, that health is one of the most powerful factors of social integration and cohesion, but also wealth generation and well-being. The document lists several factors that influence how we live and, consequently, our health status, i.e., the health status thus results from a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental, and behavioral factors. Another idea in this document that should be highlighted is that if living conditions, such as work, education, or housing, are determinants, then socio-economic, cultural, and environmental conditions, at a more macro level, also influence the health of individuals. It is also mentioned that the right to health protection is a joint responsibility of individuals, society and the State and comprises access, throughout life, to the promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of health, to continued care and palliative care (Law No. 95/2019, Official Gazette No. 169/2019, Series I of 2019-09-04).

Another important aspect is related to the social costs, i.e., a healthy population generates more wealth and, consequently, an investment in health with a positive return. It is important to note that dif-

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