

September 1997 (Volume 38, Number 3)

Health Status and Use of Health Services by the Elderly in Zagreb, Croatia

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Aim. To assess the present health status of the growing elderly population in Zagreb and Croatia.

Methods. Assessment of health needs was performed at the Gerontology Center of the Zagreb Institute of Public Health, based on health and statistical characteristics of the population, data on the patients in primary health care and in one of the Zagreb hospitals, and death certificates submitted by physicians.

Results. In 1991, Croatia had 11.6% of inhabitants at the age of 65 and over, with an estimated increase of 12.3% in 1995. Presently, the average life expectancy for people living in 1988-90 is 68.2 years for men, and 75.8 years for women. Patients 65-85 years of age made 32.0% of all patients in one of the leading hospitals in Zagreb. Cardiovascular diseases ranked first with 33.8%. Diseases of the circulatory system were also the leading cause of death (47.3%), followed by neoplasms (24.2%). The 65-74 age group had a share of 26.4% in the total mortality.

Conclusion. Our results indicate that the Croatian population is growing old, and that the elderly have their specific health needs. This calls for more intensive planning of health care for the elderly in Croatia, especially with respect to treatment, nursing, and rehabilitation at the patient's home and within family medicine.

Key words: *aged; health services for the aged; primary health care*

Received: May 22, 1997

Accepted: July 2, 1997

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