

WELCOME BY THE PRESIDENTS

The president of the Congress, Dr. Faustino Ferreira, and the president of the EFIM, Professor Stefan Lindgren, leave their messages to all the participants

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125 YEARS OF INTERNAL MEDICINE

The specialty of Internal Medicine was born there are 125 years, in Germany. It is worthwhile to remember this date and the way of this specialty until nowadays

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BOOKS IN THE CONGRESS

The release of new books is one of the marks of this Congress. Know a little of their content and when they are presented

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Study about cost-efficiency relationship
of Internal Medicine

PEDRO PITA BARROS
PRESENTS TODAY THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS



INTERNAL MEDICINE IN THE HOSPITAL – WHAT FUTURE?

The study aims at knowing if internists contribute to restraining hospital expenses

A team composed of researchers from the Faculty of Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, led by the economist Pedro Pita Barros, is carrying out a study to determine if Internal Medicine spends more money than the other specialties

Participants in this Congress have the privilege of being the first ones to know the preliminary results of a study which, to a certain extent, is unseen throughout the world. It is an academic research carried out by experts of the Faculty of Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, at request of the Portuguese Society of Internal Medicine.

The first results are presented today by the study coordinator, Professor Pedro Pita Barros, at the session «General internists at the Hospital: cost saving or big spenders?», which will take place in auditorium 1, at 4 p.m.

This study is innovative because it produces a quantitative analysis. «What we want to know is if in hospitals where Internal Medicine plays a relatively more important role costs are higher or lower than in similar hospitals where that role is replaced by other specialties. On the other hand, we also intend to know if in case patients were treated with means other than Internal Medicine more resources would be used», states Professor Pedro Pita Barros.

Brief profile of Pedro Pita Barros

- 40 years old;
- Professor at the Faculty of Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa;
- PhD since 1993. Title of dissertation: «Ensaio em Economia Industrial»;
- President of the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, between March 2003 and December 2004;
- Deputy Director of the Faculty of Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, between October 2002 and March 2003;
- Vice-Director of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa between February 2002 and January 2003;
- He is among the most-cited Portuguese economists in foreign publications, mainly in the fields of health, regulation and competition.



Internists – «firemen» inside the hospital

When questioned about the existence or non-existence of an underspecialization within Internal Medicine itself, Pita Barros denies this risk and highlights the real threat of this specialty degenerating and physicians «running away» to other specialties.

How to avoid this risk? «There are solutions such as the creation of boards or the use of management rules that allow each unit to award their physicians. If a certain hospital understands that a physician should be better paid as a way of attracting him/her to Internal Medicine, it must be given the freedom to do so», answers the economist.

All this because it is important to keep in mind that internists play the role of «firemen» in hospitals, since «they are the ones who handle the most complicated situations, even though the development of specialties is gaining ground compared with Internal Medicine».

The main objective of this research is to understand what is the contribution of Internal Medicine to the hospital functioning. For that purpose, two parameters are analyzed – costs and efficiency. Thus, this research follows two criteria. On the one hand, that of knowing if emphasizing Internal Medicine within the hospital implies more costs, and, on the other hand, that of finding out if, for each concrete case, that specialty is more or less efficient than others, whenever it is possible to choose the type of Service to treat the patient.

The days when Internal Medicine played one of the most important roles in the midst of the hospital structure seem to be somewhat forgotten. Nowadays, more and more specialties are replacing Internal Medicine. And it is becoming clear that «this specialty deals with the most complicated cases, that is those patients who suffer from several problems, and therefore are not

directed to any of the other specialties», says Pita Barros.

Since Internal Medicine deals with these more complicated cases, it ends up spending more money per patient. This leads us to think that this specialty is less efficient than the others. However, as the expert sustains, «the problem of looking at the figures in this manner is that the patients starting condition is being ignored, and thus the comparison cannot be made».

According to this economist, «it is necessary to go beyond the comparison of ratios and understand that the result, either in terms of cost or of clinical result, depends on two factors: the person's clinical condition and the resources available at the hospital». Hence, Pita Barros continues, «only when groups of similar patients are studied, can one say that treating them in a particular Service is more or less efficient in economical and organizational terms».