International Classification of Primary Care
A systematic review

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Abstract

The aim is to present the results of a systematic review of International Classification of Primary Care. The reference period was from 1985 to June 2007. Ninety nine articles were included. It is possible to observe a progressive growth on ICPC articles production, but the studies were concentrated on few countries. ICPC showed to be a promising classification, but its use needs to be widespread.

Introduction

In 1978 the World Health Organization (WHO) invited a group, the ICPC Working Party, formed by members of the Classification Committee of WONCA (World Organization of Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians) to develop a classification specific for the primary health care context. The intention was not to substitute the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), but to complement it. In the beginning, a reason for consultation classification – the National Ambulatory Medical Care System Reason for Visit Classification (NAMCS-RFV) was formulated. Later, two other classifications joined this one: the International Classification of Process in Primary Care (IC-Process-PC) and the second version of the International Health Problems on Primary Care (ICHPPC-2). The union of the three classifications resulted on the creation of the International Classification of Primary Care (ICPC)² in 1985, only published in 1987 by Oxford University Press¹. In 1998, a revision was published which allowed comparability between ICD-10 and ICPC-².

ICPC’s innovations is to know the reason for consultation from the patient perspective and also to use the episode of care as the unit of assessment¹ instead of the patient. Besides, its structure is formed by body systems. This makes it easily implemented and allows its usage by non-medical professional.

Actually, ICPC is being widely used in Europe and Australia. Nevertheless, a systematic review of the classification is not available.

Objective

To systematic review articles on ICPC.

Methods & Materials

A systematic review of the literature was carried out in Medline/Pubmed. The reference period was from 1985 to June 2007 and the key search in all fields included the terms: "International Classification of Primary Care" or "International classification of reasons for consultation in primary health care" or "ICPC-2" or "ICPC2" or "ICPC 2" or "Primary Health Care/classification mesh".

There were included original articles, editorials, letters, comments and review articles.

Two independent revisers analyzed all the abstracts. Then, the selected articles were completely reviewed for data extraction and classification. The differences on classification were solved by consensus, with the participation of a third reviser in doubtful situation.

Results

The search resulted in 190 articles. Eight six were excluded: eighteen for being written in idioms other than Portuguese, English, French or Spanish and sixty eight because ICPC was not the object. Those refused by idiom were written in Norwegian (6), Dutch (5), German (3) and Croatian (3) and Danish (1). A hundred and four articles were selected to complete revision. Five were excluded because they did not focus on ICPC.

Ninety nine articles were included on systematic review, the first one being published in 1985. Although ICPC was first published in 1987 a field tried version was tested in 1983 in many countries. Grouping in periods of five years, it is possible to observe a progressive growth on ICPC articles production (Graphic 1). Most of the articles were original articles (87,9%) and were written in English (92,9%). Considering the number of articles, Netherlands was the country where more studies were carried out, followed by Australia (Table 1). Most articles were published in family medicine reviews (41,4%). In the first years, as expected, almost all articles focused on ICPC’s history and methodology. From this point, articles on application of the classification began to gain evidence.

Conclusions

ICPC showed to be a promising classification, evidenced by the growing number of articles. Meanwhile, it seems that the use of the classification is still restricted to some countries.

References


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