



Bermuda Health Council Feature
Submitted to the Bermuda Sun on 5th January 2011

BERMUDA'S HEALTH SYSTEM CHECK-UP

Copyright © 2011 Bermuda Health Council

We've all been there before. Sitting in the doctor's office, explaining the pain in our back, soreness in our throats or the aching in our arm because we cannot figure out why we are not at our optimum. With the doctor's questions and analysis, however, a solution is found!

A country's health system can also cripple its functioning. In Bermuda it is the fastest growing part of our economy - it was worth BD\$557.7 million in 2009 - and, yet a thorough check-up on Bermuda's health system has never been done.

Until now.

For the first time in Bermuda's history, we at the Bermuda Health Council (BHeC) and the Department of Health, have done a full check-up of our health system based on information about the public, health professionals, hospitals and insurers.

We have analyzed the available data and compared it to other countries of similar high income levels - the 30 countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries (OECD). These include the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, Norway, and Switzerland to name a few.

The result is our forthcoming report that analyzes 76 indicators on everything from health status and social determinants of health, to the workforce and financing. It is called, "Healthcare in Review: An International Comparative Analysis of Bermuda Health System Indicators" and we will release all of the findings within the coming month.

To compile the report, there were a number of questions that needed to be asked. With Bermuda's healthcare spending growing by 47% (from \$378.1 million to \$557.7 million) between 2004 and 2009, perhaps the most important were: Where was the money going? And was the public happy with the result?

With that question posed we found some interesting trends, which I am happy to give you a sneak-peak of right now:

- Most people feel their healthcare needs are met. Only 11 percent of the population state they have unmet healthcare needs.

- Lack of insurance coverage was the number one complaint for their needs being unmet. This was usually for those with an income level that was under \$50k. (See graph below)
- Those with income levels above \$100k were less concerned about coverage and more worried about their unmet need for specialists and facilities.
- The population with an income that fell between these two was divided on their concerns, but was worried about the lack of Government funding.
- Overall spending on our healthcare system, however, ranks second among the OECD countries, accounting for cost of living. We are surpassed only by the USA.
- We spend 40% more than the OECD average and that amounts to 8.5% of the Island's GDP, which represents nearly 18% of all household spending.
- When Bermuda is compared to OECD countries, however, the Island's spending is proportionate in relation to its wealth.

These numbers led us to ask: Why are we spending so much? And, perhaps, more importantly is the healthcare we have making the public healthier?

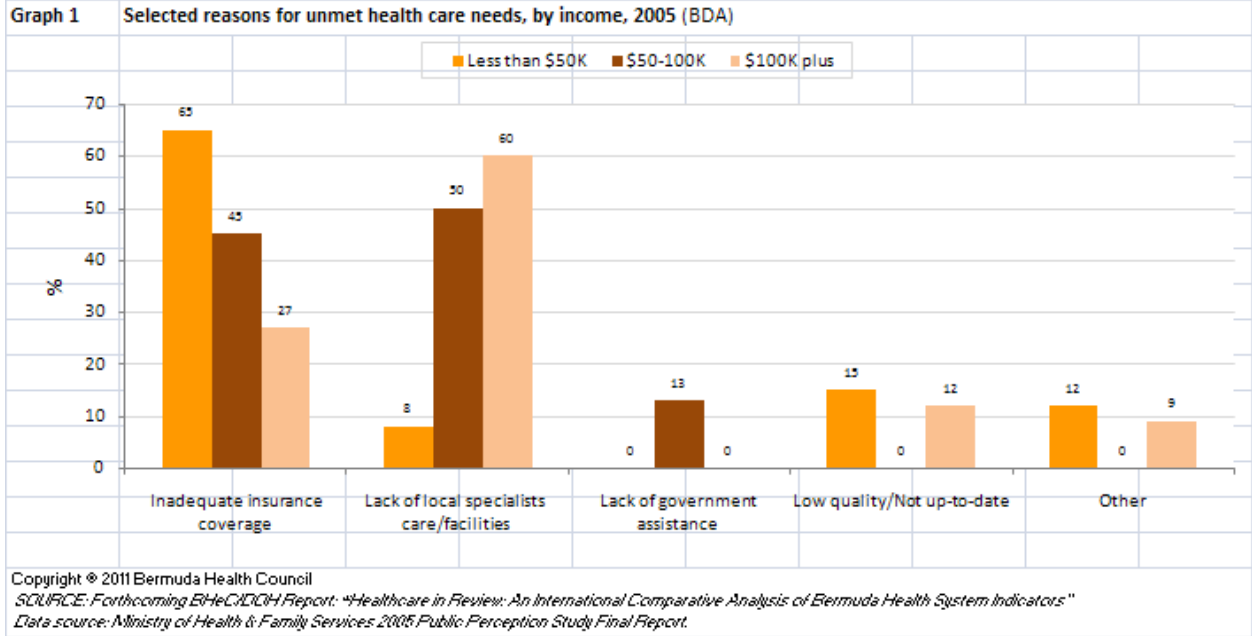
To answer these questions we pulled together statistics on diseases, deaths and activities that affect Bermuda's healthcare and, of course, compared them to the OECD countries. The areas we looked at included everything from AIDS, to diabetes, and road traffic accidents.

What we found was that Bermuda has among the highest level of obese and overweight adults compared to the OECD countries. We also have a higher rate of diabetes than all OECD countries.

Where we do well, however, is the rate of mortality for cancers. Our overall mortality rate is lower than the OECD average, and for women, is among the lowest of all countries compared.

But what might surprise you even more is our level of traffic accidents. Though we might think the Island has too many, when we compare it to all of the OECD countries the numbers are even worse. We have the highest rate of road accidents of any of the OECD countries.

I could continue, and the report that will be out soon, does. Our hope at the BHeC and the Department of Health is that now that we know where our trouble spots are we can begin to fix the problems and continue to excel in our strengths.



Dr. Jennifer Attride-Stirling is the Chief Executive Officer of the Bermuda Health Council and has been a healthcare advocate for over a decade. She has worked at the UK healthcare regulator and the London School of Economics; and has published papers on health regulation, health promotion, mental health and research methodology. Her work in Bermuda led to the introduction of various national initiatives by the Department of Health.