

Using Ambulatory Data to Shape Planning

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by Philip Katzenberger, RHIA

The information age inundates us with data. The challenge is transforming the data into information that can be used for healthcare planning. In general, obtaining the data is easy but creating information from it begins by asking a few questions:

- Who will use this data?
- How does this data relate to ambulatory care?
- What is the objective?
- Is the data external or internal?
- How should the information be presented?
- What does it mean?

Ambulatory administrators look at external data for strategic planning to meet the healthcare needs of the community and surroundings. Ambulatory services complement other sectors in healthcare like mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, and public health, by providing a point of entry for patients needing care. When an administrator needs to assess the healthcare environment needs, start by collecting data for trend analysis for short- and long-term decision making.

1999-2001 California Birth Rates

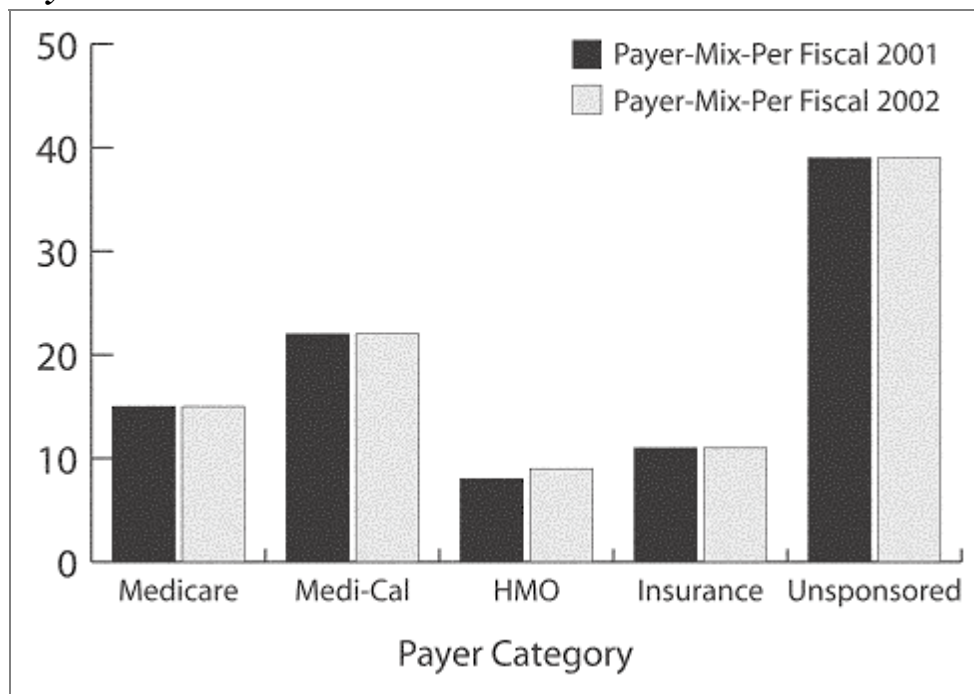
Name of Hospital	1999 Births	2000 Births	2001 Births
Regional Center of San Jose	2,532	3,068	3,037
Community Hospital of Los Gatos	878	816	869
El Camino Hospital	4,205	4,467	4,203
Good Samaritan	4,396	4,601	4,383
Kaiser Foundation	3,187	3,260	3,157
O'Connor Hospital	2,568	3,004	3,212
SJ Medical Center	729	333	-
SCVMC	3,629	4,030	4,267
Santa Teresa Community Hospital	2,692	2,637	2,700
St. Louise	549	853	732
Lucile Salter Packard	4,598	5,064	5,245
Total	29,963	32,133	31,805
Source: 1999 & 2000 from OSHPD, 2001 based on hospital interviews			

There are several sources of external data. Consider contacting peers and coworkers, searching the Web, and reviewing professional publications. For example, if your organization was considering opening a new OB/GYN primary care clinic, you might assess community needs using sources such as:

- **Office of State Health Planning and Developing (OSHPD)** at www.oshpd.cahwnet.gov. This site provides published data specific to California, but most state public health departments can provide similar statistics. In "[1999-2001 California Birth Rates](#)", the birth rates from 11 hospitals can be collected and entered in a spreadsheet to reflect market shares for surrounding facilities. This data can be used to determine the community in which a new OB/GYN primary care clinic is most likely to flourish. OSHPD is a great time saver when collecting data for decision making on healthcare cost, quality of care, and researching a community's healthcare service needs. You can find reports on clinical outcomes on heart attacks, mortality rates, and many other healthcare services. The Web site also links to several other statistical resources.

- ***The Universal Healthcare Almanac*** (Linda L. Cherner, editor, Silver & Cherner Ltd.), a book of healthcare facts, figures, and analysis with quarterly updates. It provides economic indicators, outpatient revenues, and selected vital statistics and demographics. For example, outpatient revenues are projected to increase at an average of 8.7 percent per year in 2002 compared with .2 percent for inpatient revenue. The information in the almanac can be used to determine whether trends suggest increasing or decreasing healthcare services in a particular area.
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Census 2000 information** at www.cdc.gov. Enter "census 2000" in the CDC search field. The results returned include numerous reports that contain sound population denominators by county or district that users can use for their own reports. For example, the total population of a county can be used as a denominator when comparing hospital financial data to population by district. Using payer mix (insurance, Medicare, self pay, unsponsored, etc.) by district will help determine if the community can financially support a needed service or if federal or state funding will be required.
- **Dykes Library's Online Medical Reference System** at <http://library.kumc.edu/omrs/index.htm>. We gleaned the information in "[Payer Mix in Area B](#)" using this source. Using spreadsheet software to create referencing graphics, maps, or data tables helps the administrator share the information with those interested in funding health services.

Payer Mix in Area B



Overall, when obtaining data relating to ambulatory care, knowing how the data complements the objective makes it useful information. Use the Web and peers to help guide you to collect data. Finally, using charts and graphics to present meaningful data will give your audience a picture to remember. As HIM professionals, exploring the data that administrators use to make healthcare decisions allows us to better align our efforts with our organizations.

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