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## EDITORIAL

## Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research in Latin America: A Promising and Developing Field

We are proud to present this special issue of *Value in Health: Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research in Latin America*. We present a combination of plenary summaries presented at the International Society of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) Second Latin America Conference held in Brazil during September 2009, and original research studies conducted in our region. We think this *corpus* gives a very rich picture of the current state of pharmacoeconomics and outcomes research in Latin America.

Like the ISPOR Asia Consortium [1,2], the ISPOR Latin America Consortium promotes biennial conferences held in the region with a two-fold mission: to help develop knowledge and capacity for health economics and outcomes research in Latin America and to promote the use of health economics and outcomes research in policy-making processes, with the goal of improving resource allocation efficiency. This second ISPOR Latin American conference, with its theme “Uniting Research and Policy to Improve Health Care in Latin America,” had a major level of participation and success in the region.

During the past decade or so, a large number of Latin American countries have undertaken profound reforms of their health care systems. Even though the details are country-specific, a common issue is the need to establish a mechanism that ensures efficient allocation of scarce resources, as well as guaranteeing a wide provision of health care services on the basis of local population needs and equity [3].

We are currently witnessing the adolescence of the health economics and outcomes research field in Latin America after reaching some relevant regional milestones, namely the establishing of the Latin American branch of the International Clinical Epidemiology Network during the 1980s, development of the Thematic Network on the Economic Evaluation of Health Programmes in Latin America (NEVALAT) in the early 2000s, the growth of the Cochrane Collaboration, the creation of several health technology assessment agencies in the region affiliated with the International Network of Agencies for Health Technology Assessment around 2005, as well as the creation of the ISPOR Latin America Consortium and local country chapters acting from 2006 on. In addition, regional common country alliances like MERCOSUR and the Andean Community are also advancing in harmonizing health technology assessment and economic evaluations in their member countries.

It has been a great learning experience to be the editors of this special issue, the review process of which adheres to current standards for international scientific journals. Both the

process and the results reflect the challenges of a region like Latin America, which is in the early phases of strengthening the health economics and outcomes research field [3]. Barriers include the scarcity of good and methodologically sound questions, difficulty in using state-of-the-art methods and tools, paucity of local primary data and therefore reliance on international data in the field of modeling studies, and a limited discussion of applicability of results to inform and influence decisions [4]. A recent study [3] concluded that to promote the use of economic evaluation in this region, two main conditions need to be fulfilled: 1) adequate resources and skills need to be available; and 2), decision-making process needs to be modified to accommodate evidence-based approaches such as economic evaluations [3].

From the 57 submissions we received, 30 articles were accepted for final publication in the current issue. We have representation from six countries, and the topics range from economic analysis (53%), to health outcomes analysis (40%) and health policy analysis (7%). Though all abstracts are in English, we decided to publish not only studies written in English (50%) but also in Spanish (40%) and in Portuguese (10%), because these are the two main languages used in Latin America. A majority of the issue reviewers were from Latin America (64%), which also shows the growth of interest in the field. Reviews were usually heterogeneous and sometimes discordant, and we made a large effort to try to reconcile them as much as possible.

We are a part of the first attempt to publish a special issue of original research in the field conducted in Latin America, with plenty of examples of studies in this growing discipline. We are aware that this is an evolving field in our region, and that most of our production does not satisfy the most rigorous international standards (i.e., descriptive studies of a highly selected population, economic evaluation with scarcity of good quality local data inputs, small sample size, basic analytical approaches in observational studies, or modeling techniques in economic evaluations). Nevertheless, we think the glass is half full, with many regional efforts reflected.

We hope you enjoy what to our knowledge is a milestone that reflects the current state of the art of the health economics and outcomes research field in Latin America. It is our desire that it can act as a stimulus to our community to strengthen our capacities and standards to contribute to evidence-based resource allocation decisions in this rapidly growing region.

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