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Improved performance assessment through a health data navigator

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In light of fiscal constraints and increasing demand for health and social care everywhere, performance assessment of health systems is crucial to improve our understanding of patterns of health care provision and to inform the development of health care policies through reliable cross-country comparisons. While a range of studies have investigated the performance of health systems across countries policy lessons are often limited or speculative largely due to constraints in the availability and reliability of appropriate data. Researchers typically face a trade-off between the use of very detailed national data which are often not suitable for cross-country comparison and the deployment of a limited set of aggregate international data which are often inappropriate to address specific research questions, in particular related to diseases with high and increasing volume of care and cost involved, e.g. chronic disease.

EuroREACH aims to address this challenge by improving access to and use of health care data to enhance comparative research on the efficiency, equity and quality of health systems (www.euroreach.net). EuroREACH is an international coordination action of nine partner countries funded by the European Commission FP7 program. The final outcome of the project, the Health Data Navigator is a digitized compendium of available national and international health data sources with a particular focus on patient-level and disease-oriented data. The project reviewed available data sources and informs about the quality of data through a standard set of appraisal criteria by providing insights into conditions for data access, coverage, quality as well as possibilities for data linkage. Importantly, the Health Data Navigator provides a toolbox guiding researchers in performance assessment by proposing a framework to ensure high quality research when comparing data across countries. In this context a case study on diabetic care was conducted to highlight opportunities as well as challenges when comparing patient-level, disease-oriented data across Estonia, Israel and Finland.

Key terms: health care data, performance assessment, health system comparison