ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES
ENERGY, MOBILITY AND OTHER REAL WORLD APPLICATION

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PREFERENCE BASED DECISIONS IN HEALTH

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Abstract
The decision making process within a context of limited resources has important consequences on the health of individuals. The criteria by which health technology assessment and health interventions are decided, as well as the review of current procedures represent a challenge for decision makers in the face of the current economic slowdown. The decision making process requires a transparent and rational approach to ensure the maximization of health care and the reduction of inequalities. Economic evaluation techniques may provide a valid solution to achieve these goals. Preference based measures are part of economic evaluation techniques. These approaches incorporate utilities for health outcomes and can be used in cost-benefit analyses to aid resource allocation decisions. They may also meet the needs of citizens. However, the methodological challenges regarding particular situations and the preference based measures currently in use require further research in order to improve cost-benefit analysis and explore alternative preference elicitation methods for decision making. The comparative studies concerning the application of different techniques to obtain utility values show that techniques such as Discrete Choice Experiment are promising with regard to the use of the more traditional Visual Analogue Scale, the Time Trade-Off and the Standard Gamble. However, this technique still presents challenges and requires improvements. Further applications of this technique along with the

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implementation of hybrid methods are needed to support the decision making process. This paper provides a brief description of each of these techniques and illustrates some of their applications.

Keywords: Preference based decisions, Standard Gamble, Time Trade-Off, Discrete Choice Experiment, Economic Evaluation.

1. Introduction

In health policies as in other areas of the economy, decisions are based on the existence of limited resources. In any of the public, private or social components of a health system these decisions have clear consequences on the health of populations.

Economic evaluation is a process to prioritize and decide on efficient allocation of human, financial and technological resources. Its main purpose is to support the decision makers on the choice of efficient and equitable options, when comparing costs and consequences of alternative programmes and health interventions (Brazier et al., 2007; Drummond et al., 2005). The decision making process is rather complex as it is not limited to the decision on different alternatives according to the health gains originated. In this process multiple criteria is taken into account such as social equity, the quality of patient experience, impacts on the wider economy and the quality of evidence upon which to base a decision (Devlin & Sussex, 2011).

The process of choosing among technologies and among health interventions has contributed to a greater efficiency in the allocation of resources (Garrido et al., 2008). The multiple challenges that public health systems embrace, such as the maximization of health, the reduction of inequalities, the current economic context and the substantial pressure on state budgets, assume particular complexity to the decision-makers regarding the choice of new technologies or health programs and on the appraisal of existing procedures. Baltussen and Niessen (2006) state that problems of this nature are handled with some difficulty by