11ª CONFERÊNCIA NACIONAL DE ECONOMIA DA SAÚDE
PORTO, 8 A 10 DE OUTUBRO 2009, UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

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Sleepless Nights? The increase in Emergency Room cases at Hospital de Santa

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Objectivos (Objectives):

We address the problem of an 8% increase in the number of emergency episodes at Hospital de Santa Maria in 2008. The goal of the paper lies in using the ALERT database from the HSM and combine it with demographic features to infer drivers of emergency affluence.

Metodologia (Methodology):

The methodology can be divided into three essential parts: 1) a demand curve is estimated; along with other econometric models (duration model for waiting times; multinomial logit model for Manchester triage colour and destination after observation) that explain users' behaviour when resorting to the ER; 2) a model accounting for the impact of the different parishes covered by HSM as an origin for ER cases; 3) a study of repeated use of the ER and how it interacts with other variables (namely age and seriousness of the episode).

Resultados (Results):

Results show us that there is an upward trend in daily episodes, whose bulk stems for less serious cases (or ones that could be treated elsewhere). The HSM plays a role where internal structure is concerned. However, population and health system features appear as the important drivers of changes in ER turnout.

Conclusões (Conclusions):

1) Population characteristics

- Old age explains part of the increase; so do the lighter cases

- Evidence of the "wrong door effect" (cases that should be outside the ER).

2) Health system

- Possible "central hospital bias" in distant parishes

- Distance and unemployment levels in surrounding parishes and do not seem to affect affluence

3) HSM action

- Restructuring/new services – reduction in waiting times

- Changes perceived indirectly by users

4) Effective measures

- Educating public in using the correct “door”: hard task