

Recent changes in mortality data from OPCS

**Health Statistics Users Group meeting.
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The systems for receiving, coding, analyzing and presenting data from death registrations in England and Wales have recently undergone considerable change. We will present an outline of these changes, concentrating on how they affect the statistical mortality outputs. Most mortality data now comes to us in electronic form from registrars via the registration system software (RSS). Cause of death text is processed through the automated cause coding system (ACCS). ACCS is in several parts, some developed in the UK, and some by the US National Centre for Health Statistics. The main changes in the data are the introduction of routine multiple cause coding, some changes to the underlying cause selection rules, and the temporary suspension of medical enquiry letters. The nature of these changes and their effect on national statistics will be explained.

Selection Rules

Most mortality statistics are based on a single underlying cause per death. This is derived from the information given by the certifier according to the rules of the International Classification of Diseases. These have been developed over many years to maximise consistency and comparability. In addition to changes to these rules with ICD revisions, there was a clear change in England and Wales only in 1984 in the application of WHO Rule 3. With automation, OPCS have reverted to the internationally agreed form of this rule in 1993.

Medical Enquiries

We have taken the opportunity of automation to review the system for obtaining additional details on cause from certifying doctors ("medical enquiries"). We are reviewing the range of

underlying causes which generate queries, and looking at what additional information is gained, to try and make the system more effective, efficient and responsive to changing needs. Enquiries are not being sent routinely at present. The causes effected and size of the effects will be discussed.

Multiple Cause Data

Since the 1st January 1993, as a result of automation, OPCS will be able to provide multiple cause data as well as underlying cause statistics. Every cause mentioned anywhere on the death certificate is now coded and stored, along with information about its position on the certificate. The public record data is available to DHAs from OPCS, and some routine publications of multiple cause data are planned. We will illustrate some of the opportunities for public health and research applications, looking at sequences leading to death and additional contributory causes.