



Newsletter PEN-3S

Portuguese elderly nutritional status: national prevalence study and construction of an electronic surveillance system (PEN-3S)

The PEN-3S project, an acronym for the English title "*Portuguese elderly nutritional status surveillance system*", aims to study the Portuguese elderly nutritional status and help develop an electronic surveillance system to monitor epidemiologic data regarding malnutrition in elderly individuals. The results of this research will hopefully support and establish health policies that will improve equity in health care. The main goals are:

(a) To characterize the nutritional status of the elderly (>64 years old) residing in Portugal (including in the Azores and Madeira), either in their homes or in residential care homes, by sex, 5-year age groups and geographic regions (7 NUTS II);

(b) To identify and characterize malnutrition-associated variables in the elderly (>64 years old) residing in Portugal (including in the Azores and Madeira), either in their homes or in residential care homes, by sex, 5-year age groups and geographic regions (7 NUTS II);

(c) To develop an electronic surveillance system that would assist caregivers in primary care health units and in residential care homes screening, diagnosing and intervening among this population.

This project includes two main components: (a) a national survey regarding food consumption among the elderly and their nutritional status, and (b) the development of an electronic surveillance system for screening, diagnose and referral of elderly individuals at risk for malnutrition. The elderly's national food and nutrition survey follows a cross-sectional observational design. Data will be collected through computer-assisted face-to-face structured interviews, followed by anthropometric measurements conducted by trained professionals (nutritionists or dietitians). The first interview will help gather data concerning social-demographic aspects, physical activity, nutritional status (including anthropometric measurements) and a 24h recall food questionnaire. The second interview includes a second 24h recall food questionnaire. The development of the electronic surveillance system will be based both on systematic literature review about existing similar systems (and their effectiveness) and on an expert consensus method: Delphi panel. The final product of this consensus process will be a short list of clinic indicators for nutritional screening in primary care services and in residential care homes, as well as a standard operating workflow for malnutrition diagnosis. After the development of the electronic surveillance system a pilot study will be conducted to validate the system.

RESEARCH TEAM

João Gorjão Clara, MD, is the principal investigador. The multidisciplinary research team includes doctors, nutritionists, dietitians, psychologists and sociologists.

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The PEN-3S project consultants are Agneta Yngve, Amália Botelho, José Camolas, Marisa Cebola, Alda Jordão, Ana Maria Costa, Cristina Furtado, Cristina Gomes, Evangelista Rocha, Maria Manuela Cruz and Teresa Fonseca.

FUNDING

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- Reducing economic and social disparities;
- Strengthening bilateral relations between the Donor States and the Beneficiary States.

University of Lisbon Faculty of Medicine is responsible for implementing the PEN-3S project. The Central Administration of the Health System (ACSS) is the Programme Operator.



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THE COMPLEXITY OF THE GERIATRIC PATIENT

The scientific community was taken by surprised by the growing share of older persons in the population, which originated a true "elderly people boom". This crowd of seniors has not been the subject of studies and trials that could help establish evidence-based medical guidelines to improve their quality of life and promote their active aging.



The geriatric patient is a complex subject and not everyone above the age of 65 should be considered one. People above 65 are not a homogenous population, which makes research difficult and often, by said heterogeneity, leads to different results which do not allow firm conclusions.

We lack so much information. What's the average elderly individual diet like? What circumstances determine their diets? Is it lack of economic resources? Cultural motives? Is it the natural resources of the region they live in? Does diet affect the prevalence of certain diseases? How many of them are affected by loneliness? Is loneliness a choice or a consequence of the circumstances of modern societies?

What is the prevalence of depression in elderly individuals still living at home or living with relatives of in nursing homes? Is loneliness a risk factor for depression or its consequence? The study that we propose aims to answer some of these questions. We hope that when we publish the results, clearer intervention guidelines will be established in order to improve care and the quality of life for the elderly.

João Gorjão Clara

(Principal investigator | Cathedric Professor at the FMUL)

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AT THE SERVICE OF SOCIETY

The ultimate goal of any study is to improve life expectancy and quality of life for individuals in a society. For complex phenomena, such as the nutritional status of vulnerable populations, including the elderly, the contributions necessarily have to come from a multi-disciplinary team of experts and from social actors.

At the Institute of Preventive Medicine and Public Health we have the tradition of associating experts working in key fields and institutions to study phenomena such as migrant health, access to health care or control of chronic diseases.

By associating a consortium of national and international top researchers and by articulating the PEN-3S study with the National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, we hope to contribute to inform society and decision makers, but also to empower caregivers to identify and act upon malnutrition situations... And thus bring health to individuals, families and society.



Pereira Miguel

(Director IMPSP)

PARTNERSHIPS

The PEN-3S has a set of national and international partners which will contribute to the development of the project.

International Partners

- Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway

National Partners

- University of Lisbon Faculty of Medicine Association for Research and Development (AIDFM)
- University of Porto Faculty of Nutrition and Food Sciences (FCNAUP)
- Ricardo Jorge National Institute of Health (INSA)
- University of Porto Institute of Public Health (ISPUP)



THE PEN-3S PROJECT AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION: A SERVICE TO FMUL

This Faculty has four key roles: teaching, investigating, innovating and communicating. Communication is, undoubtedly, a more recent role and, perhaps for this reason, it's also been overlooked. With regards to communication, Medical Schools are in a unique position: the nature of their work, related to people's health and wellbeing, is dear to people. This is an asset which is not always used and medical schools often waste golden opportunities to increase health literacy in the population by not disclosing their activities or open themselves to public scrutiny. These goals can be achieved in many different ways, through institutional communication of clinical, scientific or cultural activities on top of support from the media. However, the most assertive communication is, perhaps, that which focuses on well-defined projects, with well-defined goals and clearly identified teams. These are important ingredients for an effective communication. Therefore, high-impact projects should be associated with effective communication strategies, as it is in the interest of society and institutions. It is certainly what is expected of FMUL projects, such as the PEN-3S project. This is a project that will be developed within the community and its results are expected to serve that same community.

The FMUL offers its support and wishes the PEN-3S team much success in this important mission.

Miguel Castanho

(Vice faculty principal - FMUL)



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