

Availability and characteristics of cardiovascular rehabilitation programs in South America

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Purpose: Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) programs decrease morbidity and mortality rates in patients with coronary artery disease, the leading cause of death in Latin America. This study was carried out to assess the characteristics and current level of CR program implementation in South America.

Methods: We carried out a survey of CR programs that were identified using the directory of the South American Society of Cardiology and through an exhaustive search by the investigators.

Results: We identified 160 CR programs in 9 of the 10 countries represented in the South American Society of Cardiology and 116 of those responded to our survey. On the basis of survey results from the responding programs, we estimate that the availability of CR programs in

South America is extremely low, approximately 1 CR program for every 2 319 312 inhabitants. These CR programs provided services to a median of 180 patients per year (interquartile range, 60-400) and were most commonly led by cardiologists (84%) and physical therapists (72%).

Phases I, II, III, and IV CR were offered in 49%, 91%, 89%, and 56% of the centers, respectively. The most commonly perceived barrier to participation in a CR program was lack of referral from the cardiologist or primary care physician, as reported by 70% of the CR program directors.

Conclusions: The number of CR programs in South America appears to be insufficient for a population with a high and growing burden of cardiovascular disease. In addition, there appears to be a significant need for standardization of CR program components and services in the region.

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