
Editorial

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We would like to thank the publishers of the *International Journal of Behavioural and Healthcare Research* for the opportunity to edit this special issue and the authors who submitted to it.

The special issue centres on micro- and macroeconomic aspects of healthcare that are associated with the development of assisting technologies. In social and economic discussions, scientists and politicians alike have attributed a high degree of expectations to assisting technologies, as well as to information and communication systems. It is thought that the utilisation of these technologies is able to overcome some of the social and economic problems connected with the ageing and shrinking population. Even more, some believe that the health sector can be an important factor in economic growth, the quality of life and employment, especially in an ageing society. Thus, the health sector can be seen as a kind of a demographic dividend.

Against this background, Wydra and Bratan discuss the conditions under which assisting technologies will have a positive impact on economic growth and employment. They demonstrate the necessary circumstances and potential gridlocks on the basis of the German situation. However, it is not easy to see the changes created by the usage of assisting technologies, let alone the influence on economic growth, because in national accounts, the healthcare sector is not yet identifiable. Therefore, it is necessary for economic and healthcare policy to render visible that which is not immediately perceptible. Henke and Ostwald show how the Health Satellite Account (HSA) allows qualitative and quantitative analyses of the health economy on the basis of national accounts. They apply the method of national accounting to the case of Germany and are able to show that the German healthcare industry creates one-tenth of Germany's economic performance and that more than five million people (almost 14%) are employed in the health sector. Thus, with the use of the so-called HSA, the macroeconomic relevance of the health sector can be measured, and it is thus possible to

illustrate its importance for growth, export, taxes and employment. Taking a closer look, Ferraz-Nunes shows how the problem of cost measurement and benefits of health improvement in aged people can be handled using a quality-adjusted life year (QALY) approach. The analysis illustrates the importance of new technologies to improve cost efficiency in services used by aged people. This enables the solution, to a certain degree, of the problems of scarce resources in a society with an ageing population.

In addition to the macroeconomic outcome, a second area of considerable interest is the potential microeconomic effects for private households, i.e., for example, the impact on the quality of life, on the expenditure structure or the division of time. Assisting technologies aim to provide more support to meet one's daily needs and to preserve one's autonomy and quality of life, especially in advanced age. Continual developments in medicine, medical equipment, nursing and medical care are assumed to lead to new types of care. These new technologies also can be extremely relevant to people who live and work around the elderly. They often make a considerable difference to the way in which people are able to live together, for example, with nursing care assistance provided by close relatives.

However, it is not obvious that the demand for assisting technologies will increase even if people know about its positive effects. An indication for this assessment is the still slowly developing market for assisting technologies. Fachinger systematises fundamental economic aspects to explain the demand of households for assisting technologies that should be used in the development of an explanatory model. It is shown that in the discussion about microeconomic effects, only parts of the problem have been examined and relevant determinants have been ignored. Erdmann shows that changes in legal and institutional regulations as well as alternative or opportunity costs for the demand of assisting technologies in conjunction with healthcare are especially relevant to explain the future development of the market. The consequences of higher expenditures for healthcare on the expenditure structures of private households are exemplified for Germany. Unfortunately, due to data restrictions, the income and substitution effects could not be isolated. Overall, some micro-economic explanation is given for the underdeveloped market for assisting technologies.

However, the articles of this special issue show that the analysis of economic effects of assisting technology and healthcare is for the most part only beginning. Much research has to be done to develop a better insight from a macro as well as a micro economic level. However, principally it should be clear that healthcare should not be taken as an economic burden but as an opportunity for economic growth and in particular as an improvement of individuals' quality of life.

We hope that you enjoy the issue and find the articles thought-provoking.