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The use of routinely collected health examination data for medical research: The VHM&PP

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Abstract Text:

In 1976, the general practitioner Leopold Bischof wrote an article in *Methods of Information in Medicine* entitled "Die Datenverarbeitung für die Gesundheitsvorsorge in Vorarlberg". In this work, Bischof laid the visionary foundation of a system of population-based, data-driven health examinations in Vorarlberg, the westernmost province of Austria. The Agency for Preventive- and Social Medicine began to routinely document health examinations, from 1985 onwards with an IT system that functions to this day. In the beginning, contrarily to Bischof's intent, the data-recording was mainly used for accounting purposes. It was only in 2003, that the data started to be applied for medical research under the name of "Vorarlberg Health Monitoring & Promotion Programme" (VHM&PP). During the last decade, the research output from analyses of the VHM&PP database was considerable. Original publications on how risk factors track over time, on the way patterns of heart diseases vary by season, and on gender differences and secular trends in chronic disease have all made important contributions to medical literature. The research has provided a novel understanding of how gamma-glutamyltransferase and uric acid are associated with both cardiovascular and cancer outcomes. Recently VHM&PP contributed to several international pooled analyses which enhanced the understanding on how metabolic factors are involved in the risk of chronic diseases.

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