Session 6: Data Sources, Quality and Analyses

Number of Centenarians in the United States 1/1/1990, 1/1/2000, and 1/1/2010 Based on Improved Medicare Data

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In this paper, the size of the centenarian population in the United States at the beginning and end of the 1990s is estimated using improved Medicare enrollment data. Its size at the end of the next decade is projected from the starting population ages 90 and above at the beginning of the decade by extrapolating the time series of age-specific mortality probabilities during the prior decade. This time series is of intrinsic value, given the substantial interest in whether mortality probabilities at the highest ages have stopped declining.

The size of the centenarian population in the United States relative to the size of its total population and relative to the size of its aged population is compared here to the relative sizes of the centenarian populations of other developed nations. The growth in the U.S. centenarian population is viewed from an international perspective as well.

The authors have undertaken several initiatives at the microdata level to improve the quality of Medicare enrollment and mortality data for the extreme aged, particularly with respect to age reporting, recording errors and unrecorded deaths. The study reported on in this paper is based on this improved Medicare data file.