

## Epidemiology and Health Services: the trajectory of the Brazilian National Health System Journal

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**Abstract** *Epidemiology and Health Services – Brazilian National Health System Journal (Epidemiologia e Serviços de Saúde - RESS) is a scientific journal published by the Brazilian Ministry of Health. It is the continuation of the Brazilian National Health System Epidemiological Report (Informe Epidemiológico do SUS - IESUS), created in 1992. Its name changed to Epidemiology and Health Services in 2003. RESS is centred on epidemiology in health services. Its mission is to disseminate epidemiological knowledge applicable to the surveillance, prevention and control of diseases relevant to Public Health, aiming to improve the services offered by the Brazilian National Health System. This article describes RESS' trajectory, right from its creation as IESUS, up until its consolidation as an important Brazilian scientific journal in the Public Health field. Initiatives that have contributed to the journal's development are highlighted, such as the revision and implementation of the plan to strengthen the journal, the growth of its editorial board, actions aimed at promoting publication integrity, as well as activities to disseminate it, including the creation of the RESS Evidencia Prize. As a result, RESS has evolved greatly in terms of its performance indicators and was indexed in relevant bibliographical databases.*

**Key words** *Periodicals as topic, Uses of epidemiology, Health services epidemiology, Unified Health System, Information dissemination*

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## Introduction

Epidemiology and Health Services – Brazilian Health System Journal (*Epidemiologia e Serviços de Saúde – revista do Sistema Único de Saúde do Brasil - RESS*) is the only scientific journal published by the Brazilian Ministry of Health. *RESS* is the only Brazilian scientific journal focusing on epidemiology and health services and, more specifically, on the services provided by the Brazilian National Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS*). It is also the most widely circulated Brazilian scientific periodical, being distributed free of charge in all Brazilian municipalities.

*RESS* also stands out owing to its wide audience, given that it reaches not only academics in its study field, but also health workers and managers at a variety of *SUS* levels. Its main mission is to disseminate epidemiological knowledge applicable to the surveillance, prevention and control of diseases relevant to Public Health, aiming to improve the services offered by the *SUS*.

*RESS* is the continuation of the *SUS* Epidemiological Report (*Informe Epidemiológico do SUS - IESUS*), created in 1992 and published by the National Epidemiology Centre of the Brazilian National Health Foundation (*Centro Nacional de Epidemiologia, Fundação Nacional de Saúde - CENEPI/FUNASA*). Its name changed to “Epidemiology and Health Services” in 2003 when the Health Surveillance Secretariat (*Secretaria de Vigilância em Saúde – SVS*) of the Brazilian Ministry of Health was created. *SVS* has been responsible for publishing the journal ever since.

Right from its first edition, *RESS* has evolved and changed, without however altering neither its scope – epidemiological surveillance and health surveillance on a broader level – nor its purpose – to contribute to the improvement of services offered by the *SUS*.

This article describes *RESS*' trajectory, right from its creation as *IESUS*, up until its consolidation as an important Brazilian scientific journal in the Public Health field.

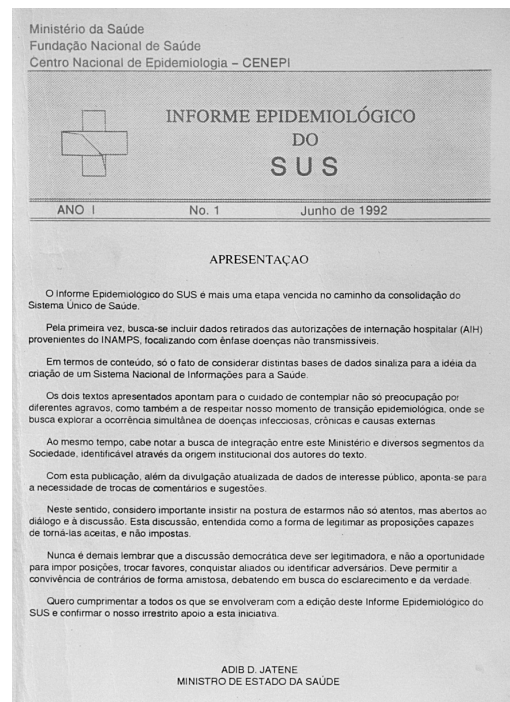
## From *SUS* Epidemiological Report to Epidemiology and Health Services Journal

*IESUS* was created in 1992 within *CENEPI/FUNASA*, with the aim of organizing and disseminating, in a wider manner, certain epidemiological information that until then had been accumulating separately in different Ministry of Health departments<sup>1</sup>.

The foreword to the first edition of *IESUS* was written by Dr. Adib Jatene, the then Minister of Health, who presented it as a tool for disseminating epidemiological data of public interest, as well as being a space for debating with society. The first *IESUS* editors were: Pedro Chequer, Maria da Glória Teixeira, Maria Goretti P. F. Medeiros, Moisés Goldbaum, Euclides Castilho and Maria Lucia F. Penna. In the years that followed, these and other editors worked to produce *IESUS* and made an important contribution to its development.

The first editions of *IESUS* published tables containing periodically consolidated data on the distribution of mandatory reportable diseases in the Brazilian regions and states. Up until 1995 it also published data on *SUS*-funded hospital admissions. Apart from the series of data, articles were also published on issues relevant to epidemiological surveillance, such as the outbreak of cholera in Brazil referred to in the first edition<sup>2</sup> of the Report, the cover page of which can be seen in Figure 1.

The process of *IESUS*' editorial production during this initial stage was characterized by



**Figure 1.** Cover of the Brazilian National Health System Epidemiological Report (*IESUS*) first issue, 1992.

strong ties with its sponsor, *CENEPI/FUNASA*, this being a fundamental factor for its implantation.

According to Silva Júnior<sup>3</sup>, in this first period of its existence, “*IESUS* had a hybrid nature, a mixture of a bulletin publicizing epidemiological data and a journal disseminating articles”.

In 1998, *IESUS* underwent an important transformation, whereby its editorial board was enlarged and experts in epidemiology and public health were incorporated, in addition to a new graphic design similar to that which would later be used by *RESS*. The position of Editor-in-Chief was created and taken up by *CENEPI*'s director at that time, in addition to now having three executive editors. A “board of rapporteurs” was also set up, comprised of guest experts in the areas covered by the journal and who would later become *CENEPI*'s Board of Consultants<sup>3</sup>.

During this time of transformation, *IESUS*' graphic design was revamped, its size was enlarged to A4, its bibliographical references were formatted according to the Vancouver Style and article abstracts were included. The number of copies per edition were increased to 25,000 and distributed in of all Brazil's municipalities, thus making *IESUS* the most widely circulated scientific journal in the country<sup>3</sup>.

More importantly, *IESUS* began publishing mostly original articles relating to defined themes which included health situation assessments; aetiological studies; epidemiological evaluation of services, epidemiological surveillance programmes and technologies, and epidemiological surveillance evaluation. Other article types for publication were also defined: review articles on issues relevant to public health; meeting and workshop reports; comments; notes; and article reprints.

In 1999, *IESUS* published a Portuguese language version of the International Committee of Medical Journals Editors (ICMJE) Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts submitted to Biomedical Journals<sup>4</sup>. The recommendations current at that time, known as “Vancouver Style”, also became a guide for the editorial process and ethical matters involved in all the stages of this process.

According to Silva Júnior<sup>5</sup>, during its second period in which it aimed to reach workers involved in the health system and health services, *IESUS* “also puts itself forward as a space open to academic production more directed towards the reality of health in Brazil and production coming from professionals working with disease epi-

demology, prevention and control”. At that time, although *IESUS* was a “young” journal published outside the academic world, the expectation was that it would contribute “to encouraging reflection among health workers and increasing the ability to solve urgent Public Health problems”<sup>5</sup>.

Forty-nine issues of *IESUS* were published between 1992 and 2002. They contain a variety of articles providing an important record of the development of health information systems and the evolution of the analysis of the data produced by these systems. According to Gomes, the dissemination of themes relating to health information systems through *IESUS* reflected “not only editorial interest, but also the efforts of qualified professionals working in the sector to improve the quality of information available for public health actions”<sup>6</sup>.

In this way, the period prior to the creation of *RESS* brought together the conditions necessary for it to be proposed, this time under the responsibility of the Health Surveillance Secretariat (SVS) of the Brazilian Ministry of Health. *IESUS* had become a more consistent and mature publication at the time it stopped being published. Its continuity and the reinforcement of the option for scientific journal were ensured by the creation of Epidemiology and Health Services, The Brazilian Unified Health System Journal, in 2003.

SVS was created in the same year and brought together under single management communicable disease surveillance, prevention and control activities under the responsibility of the Federal Government which, up until 2002 had been dispersed among different Ministry of Health departments. The actions and programmes formerly coordinated by *CENEPI/FUNASA* were brought together with the STD and AIDS, tuberculosis, Hansen's disease and hepatitis programmes, formerly subordinated to the demised Health Policies Secretariat. In addition, a new Health Situation Assessment Department was created within the structure of SVS. The General Coordination for the Development of Epidemiology in Health Services (*CGDEP*), from the Health Surveillance Management Department (*DEGEV*), became responsible for publishing *RESS*<sup>7</sup>.

SVS was created with the aim of strengthening health surveillance actions. Within this context, *RESS* stood out as one of the instruments to be used so that the newly created SVS could fulfil its mission to make epidemiological knowledge public<sup>7</sup>.

Most of the members of the editorial board, the executive secretariat and the board of rap-

porteurs who had been mainly responsible for *IESUS*' progress since 1999 remained during the transition from *IESUS* to *RESS*. The changes to the publication's title and format arose from the need to be brought into line with the journal's new role which, although it had kept the same scientific nature and editorial line as *IESUS*, was now explicitly directed towards health services<sup>7</sup>.

### Evolution and consolidation of the Epidemiology and Health Services journal

The first edition of the journal bearing the new name *RESS* was published at the end of 2003 (volume 12, number 1). Figure 2 shows this edition's cover page.

The journal's mission postulated at that time has remained in place to the present day: "*RESS*' main mission is to disseminate epidemiological knowledge applicable to the surveillance, prevention and control of diseases relevant to Public Health, aiming to improve the services offered by the SUS.

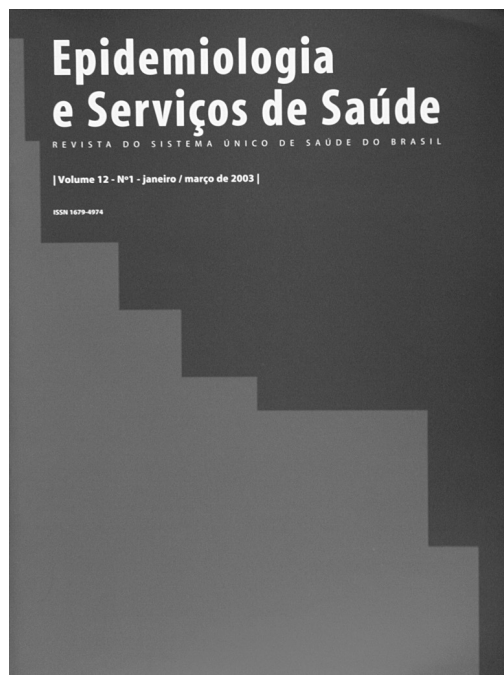
*SVS*' relative institutional stability in the years that followed, as well as the continued participation of most of *RESS*' editors and editorial

board members in this period, were important factors for the journal becoming institutionalized, whilst *RESS* also sought to ensure conditions to enable its consolidation as a scientific journal in the area of epidemiology applied to health surveillance. Such conditions achieved in earlier stages therefore needed to be maintained, while new challenges arose, in particular with regard to increasing the number of original articles published each year, reducing the time spent on reviewing submitted manuscripts, professionalization and modernization of the editorial process, in addition to achieving the highest possible scientific quality of the articles published. All of these were objectives to be pursued, but without straying from the journal's established mission and purpose. In the period that followed, several additional strategies were implemented, which combined with the efforts made during this period, culminated in *RESS* achieving promising results.

A new phase of strengthening the journal began in 2011, and this was to consolidate its trajectory. Standing out at the beginning of this period were the creation of the position of Scientific Editor and an increase in the number of members of the Editorial Board and the editorial team<sup>8</sup>. The plan to strengthen *RESS* was also reviewed, providing for a series of actions aimed at enhancing the journal and bringing it into line with publishing standards to meet the indexation criteria of more far-reaching bibliographical databases.

In an editorial published in the first 2012 edition of *RESS* (vol. 21, n. 1)<sup>9</sup>, the journal was highlighted as one of the three main publications within *SVS*' editorial policy, alongside the Epidemiological Bulletin – relaunched in March 2012– and the book series entitled Brazilian Health (*Saúde Brasil*), the first edition of which was launched in 2004. Although they have different formats and objectives, these publications are complementary and offer relevant information and analyses, principally for *SUS* workers and managers. According to Silva Júnior<sup>7</sup>, these "are important instruments for the regular dissemination of information, analyses and epidemiological studies which can contribute to reflection, enhancement and strengthening of Health Surveillance practices, actions and services in Brazil".

Also as part of the plan to strengthen *RESS*, a review was made of the instructions for authors and the journal's editorial workflow, resulting in the incorporation of new article modalities. Examples of these are research notes and experience



**Figure 2.** Cover of Epidemiology and Health Services (*RESS*) first issue, 2003.

reports, the latter involving the description of experiences in epidemiology, surveillance, prevention and control of diseases of interest to Public Health, thus creating a space for publicizing experiences selected for presentation at the editions of the National Exhibition of Successful Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Experiences (*EXPOEPI*).

Still in relation to *EXPOEPI*, another initiative aimed at strengthening and publicizing the journal was the creation of the *RESS Evidencia* Prize, in recognition of the best original article published by the journal each year. The *RESS Evidencia* Prize was implemented by SVS Ordinance No. 25, dated October 1st 2012. Its objectives are to encourage the production of original articles related to health surveillance which contribute to the enhancement of disease surveillance, prevention and control of Public Interest, as well as publicizing the journal<sup>10</sup>. The first edition of the *RESS Evidence* Prize was held in 2012 and awarded during the 12th *EXPOEPI*.

All original articles published by *RESS* are automatically candidates for the prize, except when their authors include at least one of the journal's editors. Articles considered to be eligible for competing for the prize are appraised by a panel of specialists which selects three finalist articles. These articles are presented at a competitive presentation during *EXPOEPI* and the audience votes to select the best article as the prize-winner. In addition to publicizing the journal and valuing the work of the authors, holding the final stage of the *RESS Evidence Prize* at *EXPOEPI* consolidates the journal's participation in this event which is so important for epidemiology in health services in Brazil. The result of the prize is announced during the *EXPOEPI* closing ceremony. The authors of the prizewinning articles receive a certificate and a "trophy" bearing the symbol of *EXPOEPI*.

At the same time as the implementation of the plan to strengthen the journal, *RESS* also undertook important initiatives aimed at improving the writing skills of potential authors, such as the publication of a thematic series entitled "Scientific Communication", prepared by Prof. Mauricio Gomes Pereira<sup>11</sup>. The seven articles in this series were published in 2012 and 2013 (vol. 21, n. 2 to vol. 22, n. 4)<sup>12-18</sup>. Also worthy of note is the participation of the editorial team in a variety of courses on scientific writing aimed at improving the skills of SVS professionals.

Actions undertaken by *RESS* with the aim of promoting research integrity and ethics in scien-

tific publication are also noteworthy. The training of the editorial team, principally through participation in national and international events on themes related to scientific publication was fundamental for these initiatives<sup>19</sup>. In 2013 (vol. 22, n. 4), *RESS* published the Portuguese version of the updated ICMJE Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts submitted to Biomedical Journals<sup>20,21</sup>. The following year (vol. 23, n. 1), it published a Portuguese version of the Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations<sup>19,22</sup>. With effect from 2013, *RESS* began providing its ad hoc reviewers with the Portuguese version of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines for peer reviewers<sup>23</sup>.

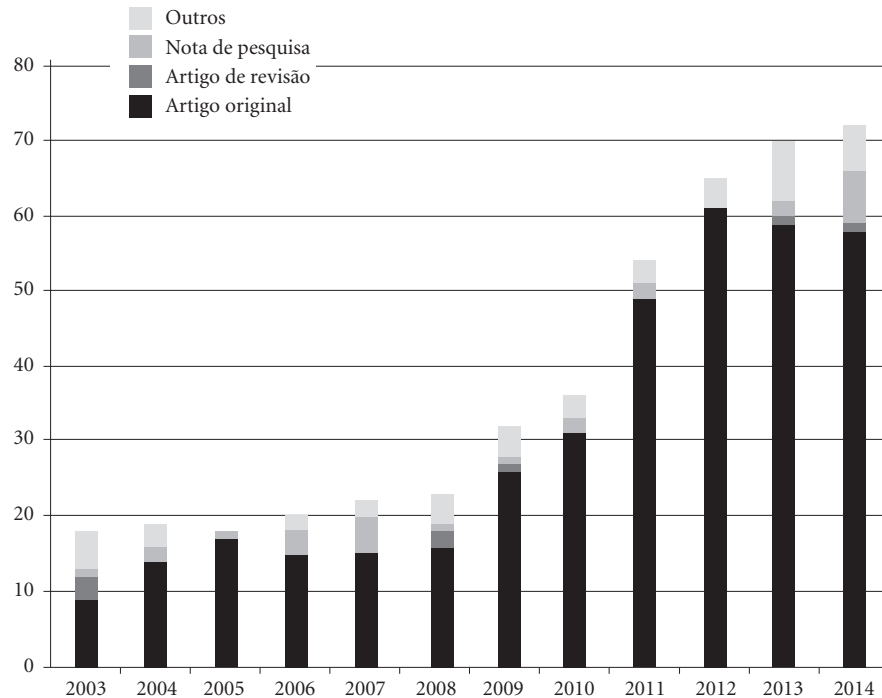
Also fundamental to the implementation of the plan to strengthen *RESS* was the support of the Evandro Chagas Institute Documentation and Information Centre (*CEDIM/IEC*) and the partnership with the Brazilian Journal of Epidemiology, edited by the Brazilian Public Health Association (*Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva - ABRASCO*).

Indicators demonstrate the progress made in recent years by *RESS* as a result of implementing its strengthening plan. There has been an increase in the number of articles submitted, the number of articles published, article citations, as well as all subsequent editions of the journal having been produced and published on time and the incorporation of editorial practices based on the most up to date ethical standards.

Graph 1 illustrates the evolution of the number of articles published by *RESS*, according to article type.

Another important result was *RESS* being indexed in relevant bibliographical databases, such as the *SciELO Brasil* collection (in June 2014) and the *SciELO Public Health (Saúde Pública)* collection in March 2015. The rigorous selection process used to accept periodicals comprising these libraries vouches for *RESS*' relevance and quality in being able to satisfy the criteria applied to the main Brazilian public health scientific periodicals<sup>24</sup>.

Despite being a periodical linked to Federal health administration in Brazil, rather than to a research institution or a professional association, like the majority of scientific journals, *RESS*' editorial process is autonomous and does not differ from that of other Brazilian journals in the Public Health field in the majority of its aspects. *RESS* uses the peer review process and follows ICMJE<sup>21</sup> and COPE<sup>25</sup> guidelines. The stages of



**Graph 1.** Number of articles published in Epidemiology and Health Services, according to manuscript type, 2003-2014.

the peer review used by *RESS* are described its instructions to authors<sup>26</sup>.

Standing out as an element reinforcing *RESS*' autonomy is its low degree of endogeneity, i.e., the majority of the Board of Editors, authors and reviewers are external to *SVS*, the institution responsible for publishing *RESS*. Moreover, since the elimination of the position of Scientific Editor in 2014, the position of *RESS*' Editor-in-Chief has been occupied by an epidemiologist belonging to an institution external to the Ministry of Health, namely the Institute of Applied Economic Research (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – IPEA*).

In truth, the fact of *RESS* being linked to the Ministry of Health and the responsibility for publishing it lying with *CGDEP/SVS* has been an essential factor for ensuring its maintenance during its almost 25 years of existence. Another of *CGDEP/SVS*' attributions is training *SUS* health surveillance workers and this includes fostering postgraduate specialization and professional master's degree courses in health surveillance. *RESS* is a privileged space for the dissemination

of the products of these courses – final dissertations –, given its outstanding ability to reach *SUS* workers and its editorial interest in promoting partnerships between them and members of the academic world. 29 of the 72 original articles, review articles, research notes and experience reports published in *RESS* in 2014 had at least one academic author and one health service author.

The themes of the majority of the articles published in *RESS* reflect Brazil's epidemiological situation. For the most part articles are about communicable diseases, external causes, chronic non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, occupational health, environmental health and oral health. Recently there has been an increase in the number of articles derived from studies evaluating programmes and public policies and these are considered to be extremely pertinent to the journal's scope.

Figure 3 provides a summary of *RESS*' trajectory from its creation to the present day, highlighting the main features of its editorial process, by periods and events of relevance to its progress.

### Epidemiology and Health Services: commitments and perspectives

The process of *RESS*' consolidation occurred in parallel to the development of health surveillance actions within *SUS* and also in parallel to the process of *SUS* becoming consolidated. *IESUS*, the periodical which was the precursor to *RESS*,

was created only four years after *SUS* came into being via the 1988 Federal Constitution<sup>27</sup>. Since then *RESS* has contributed to the transformation of the role of epidemiology in health services and to disseminating the importance and the usefulness of epidemiological analyses for health services and management, at local primary care centre level, state level and federal level. Further-

Timeline								
Periods	Implementation of IESUS-1992-1995		Maturation of IESUS-1998-2003		Implementation and development of the RESS - 2003-2010		Consolidation of RESS - 2011 to the present	
Landmarks	Creation of IESUS (1992)	Differentiation between the content published on IESUS (with assignment of ISSN) - and Epidemiological Reports (1995)	Indexing in LILACS; Created the position of Editor-in-Chief (1998)	Creation of SVS/MS and creation of RESS (2003)	Instituída a Editoria Científica; Ampliação do Comitê Editorial (2011)	Aceita para compor a coleção SciELO Brasil (2014)	Aceita para compor a coleção SciELO Saúde Pública (2015)	
Main aspects of the editorial process	Editorial process strongly linked to the institution, favorable factor to its creation		Editorial process with relative institutional autonomy. Executive managers of the institution were journal's consultants		Professionalised and independent editorial was a favorable factor to the its consolidation as a scientific journal			
Format and periodicity	Printed, montly	Printed, quarterly	Printed (A4 format), quarterly	Printed, quarterly	Printed and electronic, quarterly	Printed and electronic, quarterly	Printed and electronic, quarterly	
Circulation of the printed version	20,000	20,000	20,000	25,000	30,000	30,000	30,000	
Access	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	
Institutional binding	CENEPI/FNS	CENEPI/FNS	CENEPI/FNS	SVS/MS	SVS/MS	SVS/MS	SVS/MS	

Figure 3. Historical evolution of Epidemiology and Health Services – Brazilian National Health System Journal, 1992-2015.

more, *RESS* has lived through and recorded the growth of the presence of epidemiology and the use of epidemiological methods and instruments in public health decision-making. It has also accompanied the development of health information systems in Brazil and has published many articles containing analyses of data derived from such systems.

In recent years there has been significant growth in scientific production in the area of public health in Brazil, reflecting the increase in number of postgraduate programmes in this area. Between 2011 and 2014, SVS alone supported the development of 22 postgraduate specialization and professional master's degree courses in health surveillance (involving 2,207 postgraduates) and to a certain extent this strengthens integration between academia and health services. At the same time, public health has advanced in that the scientific standards of evidence-based interventions and actions have been enhanced<sup>28</sup>.

Within this context *RESS* has become consolidated as an important means for disseminating scientific production in the Public Health field in Brazil. After having achieved indexation in bibliographic databases that use rigorous criteria for journal indexing, *RESS* is now among the main Brazilian journals in that field.

Notwithstanding the progress achieved, the *RESS* team remains committed to the journal's constant improvement. Initiatives to achieve this in the near future include an electronic submission system and the publication in English of entire articles selected by the editors alongside the original version in Portuguese, in the electronic edition of the journal.

*RESS* is a privileged medium for disseminating within *SUS* scientific contents regarding epidemiology and will continue to publish all its contents in Portuguese. Its printed version will also continue to be produced and distributed free of charge, although keeping the database of its 30,000 subscribers up to date is a permanent challenge to ensuring that the journal reaches its readers in the different Brazilian municipalities.

Another *RESS* initiative to strengthen the use of epidemiology in health services is the publication of the thematic series entitled "Applying Epidemiology". It began being published in the first edition of 2015 (v. 24, n. 1) with the article "Translational epidemiology: some considerations", written by Professor Moyses Szklo<sup>29</sup>. Other conceptual and methodological aspects of applied epidemiology, with articles from guest authors, will provide continuity to this initiative.

In the future new challenges will arise, such as indexation in other international scientific literature databases, like Medline, the United States of America National Library of Medicine's (NLM) premier bibliographic database.

Although *RESS* has undergone transformations, it is important to highlight that the journal has not strayed from its mission, nor from its particularity of transiting between health services and academia, seeking to integrate the important contributions of both of them.

In 2016 *RESS* will commemorate 25 years of existence. The prospects for the journal are to continue contributing to the development of epidemiology in health surveillance actions, by disseminating useful knowledge to health service workers and managers at different *SUS* management levels.



## Collaborations

LP Garcia and E Duarte took part in the conception of the article, gathering and analysis of information and writing the manuscript. Both authors have revised the final version of the manuscript and declare that they are entirely responsible for its contents.

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