

ANALYSIS OF PERFORMED CATARACT SURGERIES IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS IN SERBIA FROM 2019 TO 2023

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Background: The clouding of the natural lens, usually due to aging, is a progressive condition that leads to loss of vision. Cataract surgery is the only effective treatment for removing the cloudy lens and restoring vision. To decrease the number of patients on waiting lists, the Republic Fund of Health Insurance has contracted cataract surgery services with private healthcare institutions.

Method and Objective: The aim is to assess the trend in the number of patients on waiting lists and the number of operations performed after private health facilities were included in the provision of publicly funded cataract surgery services from 2019 to 2023. Data were obtained from the invoiced realization of health services and waiting list information.

Results: Between 2019 and 2023, the number cataract surgeries increased, with a significantly higher number of surgeries performed in public institutions in 2019 (70.3% vs. 29.7%). This ratio decreased in 2023 (53.3% vs. 46.7%), indicating a statistically significant trend of increasing surgeries in private institutions (chi-square test for trend; $p < 0.001$). There was a statistically significant trend of increased involvement of private institutions ($b = 2.4$; $p = 0.006$). The prevalence of people with cataracts per 100,000 inhabitants over 20 years old is rising, as is the total number of surgeries performed and the number of patients on the waiting list for cataract surgery. However, there is no statistically significant trend in the increase of surgeries performed ($b = 1426.1$; $p = 0.6672$) and the waiting list ($b = 1204.8$; $p = 0.329$).

Conclusion: Including the private sector and ensuring broader accessibility and an increase in the number of surgeries performed in both private and public sectors did not result in the expected reduction in the number of patients on waiting lists. Considering the trend of increasing prevalence, it is necessary to work on increasing the number of qualified eye doctors for cataract surgery with intraocular lens implantation.

Keywords: cataract, cataract surgery, private sector