Health Coverage, Behaviors, and Concerns Among South Dakota Farmers

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Abstract

Farmers in rural areas often have difficulties accessing affordable health insurance to maintain an adequate health status. This project examines health insurance status and the quality of health among South Dakota farmers in 2012. After IRB approval, mail surveys were sent to 1400 randomly selected rural residents in nine South Dakota counties inquiring about their use of health services, health, and health insurance status. Farmers with private insurance were more likely to have preventative screenings, flu vaccination, and work off the farm for coverage. Qualitative comments included concerns about high insurance premiums, high deductibles, and pre-existing conditions.

Methods

- Mail survey was sent to 1400 rural residents in nine South Dakota counties.
- Counties: Bon Homme, Clay, Davison, Day, Edmunds, Haakon, Hanson, Jackson, and McPherson.
- Selected based on location, unique characteristics, and directory availability.
- Nine county population studied.
- 3840 farms (USDA, 2012).
- Population: 60,977 people.
- Address data:
  - Plat and Directory Maps for each county.
  - Rural addresses abstracted.
  - 4345 addresses obtained with 1400 selected by simple random sampling.
- Analysis:
  - Quantitative data analyzed using SPSS.
  - Qualitative data analyzed using NVivo.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (% of N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance</td>
<td>115 (90.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Health Insurance</td>
<td>110 (81.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Health Insurance</td>
<td>44 (32.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Health Insurance</td>
<td>12 (9.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 45</td>
<td>16 (13.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>69 (56.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 65</td>
<td>38 (30.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>108 (85.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Married</td>
<td>18 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent or Very Good</td>
<td>75 (60.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good, Fair, or Poor</td>
<td>49 (39.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Hours Spent on Farming/week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-29</td>
<td>41 (30.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-59</td>
<td>24 (17.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-89</td>
<td>38 (28.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥90</td>
<td>32 (23.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Reason for off-farm employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>39 (28.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would leave off-farm employment if health insurance was affordable</td>
<td>30 (22.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Primary Medical Care Provider</td>
<td>101 (80.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Themes

- High and rising costs of health insurance
  - 28 Comments
  - “In the last 5 years we have gone from paying a $5000/year premium with $500 deductible to the present $16,500/year with $2500 deductible. I turned 60 in the past year and my wife will turn 60 in 2 years. I can’t imagine the cost of insurance by then. We are very quickly losing everything we have worked for the past 40 years just to pay the premiums.”
  - Government healthcare
    - 13 Comments
    - “Without Medicare it is almost unaffordable for health insurance. It cost me $10,000 per year for one person before 2006. Also, I could not change provider because of pre-existing condition.”
- Financial loss
  - 5 Comments
  - “When we were young and looked into insurance because my wife was pregnant the insurance agent said she’d be happy to insure me but not the wife because she had a pre-existing condition. What a racket – we’ll do without and trust God.”
- “My wife went to work for awhile just for the insurance benefit but I found how her absence on our farm and the office, raising a family, etc was needed for her to return. Since then, we continue to self-pay... We feel insurance poor but necessary for our business... our farm”
- Fear of financial impact of catastrophic illness, even with health insurance
  - 21%
- High asset load among farmers (land, equipment, etc.) makes financial implications higher
- The Affordable Care Act of 2010 could have a significant impact on the viability of the family farm.
- Health Insurance Exchanges will be available for those above 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Discussion and Conclusions

- The prevalence of health insurance coverage is high among farmers in South Dakota.
- Health care utilization among farmers was high.
- Health insurance coverage is becoming a deciding factor on the livelihood of the family farm.
- Individuals are forced into working off the farm due to the need to obtain affordable health insurance coverage.
- High asset load among farmers (land, equipment, etc.) makes financial implications higher.
- The Affordable Care Act of 2010 could have a significant impact on the viability of the family farm.
- Health Insurance Exchanges will be available for those above 100% of the Federal Poverty Level.

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Analysis

- Farmers with private insurance more likely to...
  - Have preventative screenings
  - Get a flu vaccination
  - Work off the farm for health insurance coverage
  - Farmers with government insurance
    - Manage the diseases they already have
    - Have less worry about making sacrifices due to health care costs

Limitations

- Response rate was low
- The survey was sent to rural addresses, many of which were acreages and did not fit the intended population.
- The baby boomers are reaching Medicare age
- Lack of young respondents
- Income and expense information was not gathered due to concerns about return rate

Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surveys Mailed</th>
<th>Surveys Returned</th>
<th>Return Rate</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>135</td>
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