Foundations of Public Health

Part I: Foundations of the Profession and Science of Public Health

TRENDS IN MORBIDITY, MORTALITY, AND BEHAVIORS IN THE US

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Introduction

To follow trends in the causes of disease and death, there are two measures of incidence that are always of interest: mortality rates and morbidity rates.

- **Mortality Rate:** A mortality rate is the incidence of fatal cases of a disease in a population during a specified time period. For example, if there were 1,807 deaths from tuberculosis (TB) in the United States during calendar year 1982 when the total population was estimated to be 231,534,000, the TB mortality rate for 1982 would be 1,807/231,534,000 = 7.8 million population per year.

- **Morbidity rate:** The incidence of non-fatal cases of a disease in a population during a specified time period. For example, in 1982 there were 25,250 non-fatal cases of TB in the US population when the population was estimated to be 231,534,000. Therefore, the morbidity rate for TB was 25,520 / 231,534,000 = 11.0 / 100,000 in 1982.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, the student will be able to:

- Define and calculate mortality rates and morbidity rates.
- Identify the major causes of mortality and morbidity in the United States.
- Discuss gender and racial differences in overall mortality trends.
- Discuss trends in the major causes of mortality and morbidity in the United States including cardiovascular disease, cancers, falls in the elderly, motor vehicle-related deaths, and deaths attributed to drug abuse.
- Discuss the temporal relationship among per capita cigarette consumption, anti-smoking campaigns and legislation, and mortality rates for lung cancer in men and women in the United States.
- Discuss where the United States ranks among nations with regard to infant mortality rates.

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