Primary care is the basic or general healthcare that focuses on the point at which ideally a patient first seeks assistance from the medical care system. It also forms the basis for referrals to secondary and tertiary level care. To fulfil this function, primary care clinics have to be widely distributed and well equipped to allow appropriately trained staff to make sound clinical decisions on treatment and referrals. In Malaysia, there were 5104 private primary care clinics and 806 health clinics (henceforth known as Klinik Kesihatan or KK) reported in 2009. The overall density of primary care clinics was 2.09 per 10000 population and the number of private clinics outnumbered the public by 6.3 to 1. The highest and lowest densities per 10000 population by state were for Wilayah Persekutuan (WP) Kuala Lumpur (3.85) and Sabah & WP (1.02). Cross migration in health seeking behaviours could explain the high consultation rates per capita in WP Kuala Lumpur compared with the national average.

The overall primary care doctor to population ratio was 2.89 per 10000 population in 2009. The states with the highest and lowest densities per 10000 population were WP Kuala Lumpur (5.58) and Sarawak (1.02). Overall, 2.4% of primary care doctors were Family Medicine Specialists (FMS) and the majority of these specialists were in the public sector. Most of the qualified nurses providing primary care service were in public clinics as a large number of private clinics employ nursing aides with minimal formal training.

Four of the many services provided in the primary care setting were analysed; 1) chronic disease management, 2) provision of home visits, 3) occupational health services and 4) maternal services. Almost all public clinics provided maternal services compared with 63.3% of private clinics. A higher percentage of public primary care clinics (85.98%) provided chronic disease management compared with the private sector (77.19%). The figures calculated from this study were lower than predicted as management of chronic diseases is one of the core functions in primary care. This underestimation could be due to poor reporting.

Approximately 1.1 clinics per 10000 population provided home visit services. Most public clinics (91.2%) compared with about half of the private clinics, (45.6%) reported providing home visit services. However as private clinics far outnumber public clinics, 76% of this service was provided by private primary care providers. Over 66% of all clinics provided occupational health services with the private sector providing the bulk of these services.

Over 70% of public primary care clinics provided emergency transport (ambulance) facilities. This parameter was not analysed for private clinics. For imaging facilities, there were 0.28 clinics with imaging facilities per 10 000 population in 2009. Terengganu recorded the highest percentage (22.3%) of clinics with imaging facilities. Only 59.9% of primary care clinics in Malaysia had their own autoclaving facilities. When analysed by sector, 58.1% of public clinics and 60.2% of private clinics had such sterilisation facilities.

Perlis, Melaka, Terengganu and Kelantan were noted to have the most number of peak flow meter (PFM) per population with estimated 135.0, 131.3, 118.8 and 111.7 per million population respectively. Public clinics in Peninsular Malaysia were noted to have more PFM and nebulisers per clinic compared with those in Sabah, WP Labuan and Sarawak. There was an average of 1 electrocardiogram machine for every public clinic in Malaysia. Assuming each private clinic had not more than 1 machine, around a third of the clinics were equipped with electrocardiogram machines. The ratio of ultrasound machines to number of clinics was 0.56 in the public sector compared with 0.17 in the private sector. The number of X-Ray machines per number of clinics was 0.14 in the public sector and 0.05 in the private sector. Overall there were 13.08 general X-Ray devices per million population in the country in 2009.

The figures here were calculated based on responses to the 1st National Healthcare Establishment and Workforce Survey 2008-09 and estimation was done to obtain national figures. Further studies should be conducted to corroborate the findings of this national survey.

Reference: