

MODELLING IN HEALTHCARE

COMPLEX SYSTEMS MODELLING GROUP





Applied Mathematics

MODELLING IN HEALTHCARE



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CSMG COMPLEX SYSTEMS MODELLING GROUP



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 $10 \ 9 \ 8 \ 7 \ 6 \ 5 \ 4 \ 3 \ 2 \ 1 \qquad 15 \ 14 \ 13 \ 12 \ 11 \ 10$

Contents

Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Complex Systems Modelling Group	xiii
List of Figures	XV
List of Tables	xvii
Part 1. Modelling in Healthcare	
Chapter 1. The Whys, Whats, and Whens of Modelling in Healthcare1. Why Model in Healthcare?2. What Is a Model?3. When to Use Modelling in Healthcare4. Related Reading	$ \begin{array}{c} 3 \\ 3 \\ 4 \\ 5 \\ 6 \end{array} $
Chapter 2. How to Use This Book 1. The Language of Modellers	7 8
 Chapter 3. The Modelling Process Selecting a Modelling Approach Forming a Conceptual Model Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis Implementing and Validating the Model Applying the Model Revising the Model Revising the Model Related Reading 	$ \begin{array}{c} 11\\ 12\\ 16\\ 16\\ 17\\ 18\\ 19\\ 19\\ 20\\ \end{array} $
Part 2. Data Collection and Statistical Models	
Chapter 4. Issues of Data Data Collection and Data Errors 1. Overview	25 25 25
2. Types of Data	25

3.	Data Quality and Data Biases	29
4.	Related Reading	32

Chapter 5. The Basics			
Descriptive Statistics and Distributions			
1. Model Overview	33		
2. Common Uses	35		
3. Mathematical Details	35		
4. Examples 5. Bolated Boading	42		
5. Related Reading	40		
Chapter 6. Predictions and Responses	49		
Regression Analysis	49		
1. Model Overview	49		
2. Common Uses	51		
3. Mathematical Details 4. Examples	01 57		
5. Related Reading	63		
Chapter 7. Evaluating Detrimental Behaviour	65		
Epidemiological Risk Modelling	65		
1. Model Overview	65		
2. Common Uses 3. Model Details	67 68		
4 Examples	73		
5. Related Reading	79		
Chapter 8. Adjusting Risky Behaviour	81		
Psychosocial Risk Modelling	81		
1. Model Overview	81		
2. Common Uses	83		
3. Model Details	83		
4. Examples	85		
5. Related Reading	89		
Part 3. Model Design and Interpretation			
Chapter 9. Issues in Mathematical Modelling	93		
Model Selection, Development, and Implementation	93		
1. Overview	93		
2. Selecting a Modelling Technique	94		
3. Developing the Model	95		
4. Implementation of Models	96		
5. Related Reading	100		
Chapter 10. Explaining Irrational Behaviour	101		
Psychosocial Modelling	101		
1. Model Overview 1			
2. Common Uses			
3. Model Details	103		

CONTENTS

4.	Examples	107	
э.	Related Reading	111	
Chap	Chapter 11. Modelling Optimal Behaviour		
Game Theory and Human Capital Models			
1	Model Overview		
1. 9	Common Uses	115	
2. 3	Mathematical Details	115	
- Э. Д	Framples	110	
ч. 5.	Related Reading	120	
	0		
Chap	oter 12. Modelling Social Interaction	125	
N	etwork Models and Graph Theory	125	
1.	Model Overview	125	
2.	Common Uses	126	
3.	Mathematical Details	127	
4.	Examples	129	
5.	Related Reading	134	
Chap	oter 13. The Future Starts Now	135	
Markov Models		135	
1.	Model Overview	135	
2.	Common Uses	137	
3.	Mathematical Details	137	
4.	Examples	142	
5.	Related Reading	149	
Char	star 14 Viewing the System of a Whole	151	
Chap C-	retern Demoming and System as a Whole	151	
j J	Stem Dynamics and Systems Thinking	101	
1.	Model Overview	151	
2.	Common Uses	153	
び. 4	Matnematical Details	154	
4. 5	Examples Poloted Pooding	100	
5.	Related Reading	102	
Chap	oter 15. Dealing with Lines and Capacity	165	
\mathbf{Q}	ueueing and Traffic Models	165	
1.	Model Overview	165	
2.	Common Uses	167	
3.	Mathematical Details	167	
4.	Examples	172	
5.	Related Reading	178	
Char	pter 16. Finding the "Best" Intervention	181	
	ntimization	181	
1	Madal Occurrent	101	
1.	Woder Overview	181	
Ζ.	Common Uses	182	

vii

CONTENTS

 Mathematical Details Examples 	183 101	
5. Related Reading		
Appendix. Computer Programming Packages Useful in Modelling	197	
1. Statistical Software	197	
2. Mathematical Software	197	
3. Simulation and Modelling Codes	198	
Bibliography	205	
Index	215	

viii

Preface

As healthcare systems worldwide face the challenge of delivering quality services while maintaining control over escalating costs, there is growing support for the view that conventional approaches to the organization of healthcare systems are failing. The questions arising are extremely complex, and in most cases it is not acceptable to rely on simple intuition to answer a given question. In order to develop solid, defendable, evidence-based answers to the complex questions arising in modern healthcare, modelling is being increasingly applied. Yet, to many healthcare policymakers, the development, tuning, testing, validation, and eventual application of a model are considered a foreign art.

A model is a simplified representation of a real-world situation used to help answer a specific question. The main role of a model is to help steer decisions in the right direction. In most cases a model cannot give the "right" answer to a problem, but it can be a useful tool in characterizing the problem and finding ways to resolve it. In this book we provide a look into the world of modelling, with particular focus on modelling in healthcare. We provide this as it is our belief that decision makers and modellers must share a certain level of knowledge to maintain a healthy relationship. Modellers working on healthcare problems cannot be blind to the less mathematical issues of healthcare, and decision makers engaging modellers should not view models as mystical crystal balls from which answers emerge. As the Complex Systems Modelling Group, we have worked extensively with healthcare policymakers and have developed expertise in developing and analyzing healthcare models and in explaining models and modelling to those unfamiliar with the subject. With this book we hope to use this expertise to help strengthen the bonds between the worlds of modelling and healthcare.

This book is by no means a complete text on the subject of modelling in healthcare. In fact each chapter in this book (with the exception of the introductory chapters) could easily be extended into a complete textbook. We hope readers will view this as a handbook of modelling in healthcare and use it to provide themselves with a broad overview of how modelling works and what it is capable of.

As a handbook of modelling techniques, each chapter of this book has been written in a self-contained manner. Any given chapter can be read without having read previous chapters (although we strongly recommend reading the introductory chapters before tackling other chapters). Any text cross-reference to a section (or subsection) refers to that section (or subsection) in the current chapter unless otherwise specified. With the exception of the introductory chapters, each chapter focuses on a particular style of modelling that is applicable to healthcare. To keep the book as self-contained as possible, most chapters contain enough background that they are accessible to anyone with a solid high school level of mathematics. To ease reading, most chapters are written using the same basic template consisting

PREFACE

of *Model Overview, Common Uses, Model or Mathematical Details, Examples,* and *Related Reading.* Readers can quickly scan the model overview and common uses sections to determine if a model is applicable to the problem they are interested in and can study the mathematical details and examples sections if more detail is desired. The related reading section points readers to further literature of interest.

It is our hope that this book will provide a stepping stone for people interested in the world of modelling in healthcare, while remaining an excellent reference guide for those more familiar with the subject. As such, this book should be of use to anyone, academic or professional, who is interested in broadening his or her knowledge regarding modelling in healthcare.

Acknowledgments

The creation of this book began when the British Columbia Ministry of Health Services commissioned the Complex Systems Modelling Group (CSMG) at Simon Fraser University to produce a report on the many different mathematical options for modelling healthcare demand. For some of us this was a first step into the world of mathematical modelling specifically for healthcare – a step that has become a defining moment in many of our lives. We would like to thank the British Columbia Ministry of Health Services for funding the original report and for their continued support during the completion of this book.

Like any large team project, the production of the final manuscript for this book was a long and complicated process. Without the assistance of the many contributing authors (listed on page xiii) the final product would have been less than it is. Nonetheless, as with any large team project, there are certain individuals whose roles were more pivotal in the completion of this work. In this respect we would like to acknowledge authors Hare, Rutherford, and Vásárhelyi, as principal authors responsible for the original report and this book.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in the Mathematical and Computational Sciences (IRMACS, http://www.irmacs.sfu.ca) at Simon Fraser University. We are deeply indebted to IRMACS for its continual support during the production of this work. Many barriers could never have been crossed without the aide of the strong team of IRMACS administrative and technical support staff.

Peter Borwein, Executive Director, CSMG October 2009

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List of Figures

Chapter 3		
Figure 3.1.	The modelling process	12
Chapter 5		
Figure 5.1.	Various probability distributions	40
Figure 5.2.	An example of poor descriptive statistics	42
Figure 5.3.	Age versus proximity to death in healthcare expenditures	44
Chapter 6		
Figure 6.1.	Linear regression example	52
Figure 6.2.	Examples of logistic curves	56
Figure 6.3.	Toes stubbed by number of stairs	58
Figure 6.4.	Linear fit to toes stubbed by number of stairs	59
Figure 6.5.	Logistic fit to toes stubbed by number of stairs	60
Figure 6.6.	Post-surgery knee extension recovery curves	62
Chapter 7		
Figure 7.1.	Simulation flow in the PREVENT Model	78
Chapter 9		
Figure 9.1.	Simple feedback loop	95
Chapter 10		
Figure 10.1.	Feedback loops in a simple influence diagram	106
Figure 10.2.	Feedback loops for the Behavioural Model of Healthcare	107
Figure 10.3.	Examining the Health Belief Model with respect to mammography visits	110
Chapter 12		
Figure 12.1.	Types of networks	128
Figure 12.2.	Cellular automata model of HIV spread	130
Figure 12.3.	Network of healthcare facilities	131
Figure 12.4.	Birthrates of Germany and Portugal	132
Figure 12.5.	Ising model analysis of birthrate drop-off	133

Chapter 13		
Figure 13.1.	The SIR model of disease spread	136
Figure 13.2.	Testing the Markov assumption	140
Figure 13.3.	A three-state Markov model of BMI status	144
Figure 13.4.	Mover-stayer model of epidemic drug use	147
Chapter 14		
Figure 14.1.	Systems thinking model relating new medicines to medicinal errors	152
Figure 14.2.	System dynamics model relating new medicines to medicinal errors	155
Figure 14.3.	Factors impacting hospital operating procedures	157
Figure 14.4.	Systems thinking model examining three factors in human weight cycling	159
Figure 14.5.	Human weight cycling plots suggested by Goldbeter's model	160
Chapter 15		
Figure 15.1.	A multiple service channel queue	168
Figure 15.2.	A multiple service stage queue	169
Figure 15.3.	Queueing models reaching various equilibrium states	171
Figure 15.4.	Dishwashing queue	173
Figure 15.5.	Hospital patient flow queue	175
Chapter 16		
Figure 16.1.	The difficulty with non-convex optimization	187

 $\mathbf{x}\mathbf{v}\mathbf{i}$

List of Tables

Chapter	3		
Table	3.1.	Models in this book	13
Chapter	4		
Table	4.1.	Common data collection methods	26
Chapter	5		
Table	5.1.	Potential outcomes of summing two rolled dice	37
Table	5.2.	Probability table for the sum of two rolled dice	38
Table	5.3.	Hypothetical data regarding various headache medications	42
Table	5.4.	Survey of accommodation environments in BC	46
Table	5.5.	Non-publicly funded accommodation environments in BC	47
Chapter	6		
Table	6.1.	Artificial data of car-related costs and mileage by month	52
Table	6.2.	Artificial data of toes stubbed in the office	58
Chapter	7		
Table	7.1.	Artificial data relating chocolate and chickenpox	73
Table	7.2.	Demonstration of Publication Bias In Situ	76
Table	7.3.	Second demonstration of Publication Bias In Situ	77
Chapter	8		
Table	8.1.	Potential effect of a slow reduction in sodium intake	89
Chapter	10		
Table	10.1.	Elements in the Health Belief Model	105
Chapter	11		
Table	11.1.	Payoff table for the Prisoner's Dilemma	116
Table	11.2.	A payoff table solved by dominance	118
Chapter	13		
Table	13.1.	Data for a hypothetical doctor-patient loyalty model	142
Table	13.2.	Coupled difference equations represented by Figure 13.4	148

Bibliography

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Index

addiction, 122 analytic solution, 184 ant colony algorithm, 190 attractors, 98 attributable risk, 66-69, 87 average, see also central tendency bell curve, see also probability distribution, normal black box, 17 blind clinical trial, 26, 31 branch and bound, 189 Brownian motion, 141 Bundle method, 187 calculus, 97 multivariate, 97 Canada Health Infoway, 29 cellular automata, 129 central limit theorem, 36, 55 central tendency, 33, 35 confidence interval, 34, 41, 43 confounding risk factors, 70 confounding risk factors, 70 constraint set, 183, 185 continuous (model), see also model, continuous continuous simulation, see also model, simulation cost containment, 20 cues to action, 104

data

cleaning, see also data, processing cohort, 28 cross-sectional, 28 experimental, 25, 27 health record, 25, 27, 28, 31 logitudinal, 28 panel, see also data, longitudinal processing, 17 self-reported, 30 serial, see also data, time series survey, 25, 27, 28

time series, 28 data analysis, see also statistics, see also statistical analysis data collection, 16, 18, 49 data error, 29 experimenter bias, 31 false positive, 32 implementation, 30 interpretation, 31 non-sampling, 29 pooling data sets, 32 publication bias, 27, 31 response rate, 31 sampling, 29 storage, 31 survey design, 30 data quality, 29 degree of separation, 34, 35 demand-access-utilization chain, see also influence diagram descriptive statistics, see also statistics, descriptive differential equation, 97 discrete (model), see also model, discrete discrete event simulation, see also model, simulation disease, definition, 9, 66 doctor-patient interaction, 19, 116, 120, 142 dominance (in game theory), 117 double blind, see also blind clinical trial duality theory, 186 dual problem, 186 edge (in graph theory), 126, 127 directed, 127 weighted, 127 electronic health record, 29 endogenous, 109 epidemic model, 130 equidispersion, 41 equilibrium, 96, 98 evolutionary algorithm, 189 exact solution method, 188 exogenous, 109

INDEX

expected value, 38, 39 explanatory variable, see also predictor variable feedback loop, 94, 102, 105, 154 flow, 152, 154 game theory, 113-115 Gauss-Markov theorem, 55 generalized impact fraction, see also potential impact fraction generalized linear regression, see also regression, generalized linear generalized method of moments, 60 genetic algorithm, see also evolutionary algorithm global minimum, 187 gradient function, 119 graph, 127 graph theory, 98, 125 healthcare demand behavioural models, 19 global models, 20 operational models, 20 population models, 19 health outcome, 65-67, 70 health stock, 115, 119, 122 heuristics, 189 hierarchical linear model, 61 human capital model, 113, 114, 119 influence diagram, 102, 106, 107 integer program, see also optimization problem, integer integral equation, 97 intervention education-based, 82, 84, 85, 87 policy-based, 81, 82, 84 primary versus secondary, 148 latent variables, 109 least squares, see also ordinary least squares lifetime utility function, 122 linear regression, 58 linear algebra, 97 linear function, 97 linear minimax problem, 118 linear program, see also optimization problem, linear linear regression, 58, 62 link function, 57 local minimum, 187 logistic curve, 55, 59 logistic regression, see also regression, logistic Markov assumption, 135, 137, 144, 145

chain, finite state, 136, 138, 142 chain, infinite state, 141 decision process, 141 order of model, 137, 139, 140 process, 141 semi-Markov process, 141 state space, 136 maxi-min criterion, see also mini-max criterion maximum likelihood estimation, 56, 57, 182 MDP, see also Markov, decision process mean, 33, 35 median, 33, 35 mini-max criterion, 117 mode, 33, 35 model behavioural, 101, 105, 106 conceptual, 16 continuous, 15 definition, 4, 8 deterministic, 15 discrete, 15 dynamic, 15 epidemiological risk, 67 guiding principles, 11 health belief, 101, 103, 107 hierarchical linear, 62 implementation, 99 Markov, 131, 135 mathematical, see also model, quantitative mover-stayer, 146 multi-level, see also model, hierarchical linear network, 126 process, 12 psychosocial, 19 psychosocial risk, 81, 107 qualitative, 9, 14, 94, 154 quantitative, 8, 14, 16, 94 queue, see also queueing theory random field Ising, 132 simulation, 17, 99 continuous, 99 discrete event, 20, 99, 176 static, 15 statistical, 49 stochastic, 15 system dynamics, 127 types, 13 validation, 14, 17, 18 model function, 49, 51 mutually exclusive events, 37 Nash equilibrium, 113, 116, 121 network, 127 network theory, 125 Newton's method, 187

216

node (in graph theory), 126, 127 degree of, 127 normal distribution, see also probability distribution, normal normal linear regression, see also regression, normal linear numerical analysis, 18, 98 objective function, 181, 183 odds ratio, 66 online algorithm, 191 optimization, 18, 98, 181 optimal behaviour, 18 optimization problem, 182, 184 combinatorial, 188 continuous, 184, 185 differentiable convex, 186 differentiable non-convex, 187 discrete, 184, 188 dynamic, 190 integer, 188, 193 linear, 185, 191 non-differentiable, 188 quadratic, 55, 186 scheduling, 191 semi-definite, 186 ordinary least squares, 53, 55, 182 overdispersion, 41 overfitting (a model), 74, 75 path, 126, 127 connected, 126, 127 patient-doctor interaction, see also doctor-patient interaction payoff function, 113, 115, 122 payoff table, 117 pdf, see also probability density function perceived barriers, 104 perceived benefit, 103 perceived efficacy, 82, 84, 104 perceived risk, 82, 84, 87 perceived severity, 104 perceived susceptibility, 103 player (in game theory), 113, 117 potential impact fraction, 71 potential impact fraction, 66, 67, 71, 77 predictor variable, 49-51, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59 prevented fraction, 66-69 PREVENT model, 77 primal problem, 186 Prisoner's Dilemma, 115, 120 probability, 33, 35, 36 probability density function, 39, 50 probability distribution, 34, 37 continuous, 38 empirical, 39 exponential, 40 finite, 38 multinomial, 39

negative binomial, 41 normal, 34, 36, 39, 55 Poisson, 38, 40 probability distribution function, see also probability density function psychosocial, see also model, psychosocial risk publication bias, 74 publication bias in situ, 74 quadratic program, see also optimization problem, quadratic queue, see also queueing theory queueing theory, 14, 20, 165 arrival pattern, 166, 168 arrival rate, 172, 176 balking, 170 blocking, 20, 169 drop-off, 170, 176 equilibrium state, 167, 170, 172 impatience, 167 Jackson Network, 175 jockeying, 170 length, 167 multistage, 169 reneging, 170 server, 165, 168 service channel, 166, 168 service pattern, 166, 168 system capacity, 166, 168 traffic model, 165–167 wait time, 20, 165 queue discipline, 166, 169 first in first out (FIFO), 166, 176 last in first out (LIFO), 166 priority schema, 166 service in random order (SIRO), 166, 176 rational addiction theory, 122, 123 recovery curve, 61 recovery rate, 61 regression generalized linear, 53, 56 logistic, 53, 55, 57, 62 normal linear, 53, 55, 57 regression analysis, 50, 51 regression coefficient, 54, 55 relative risk, 66-69, 72 representative agent, 114 response variable, 49, 51, 53, 55, 56, 58, 59 risk, definition, 9 risk behaviour, 65, 82 risk factor, 51, 65, 67, 69, 75, 77 risk ratio, 66, 87 scheduling problem, see also optimization problem, scheduling

self-efficacy, 104, 107

semi-definite program, see also optimization problem, semi-definite sensitivity analysis, 18 server, see also queueing theory, server simulated annealing, 189 simulation, see also model, simulation single blind, see also blind clinical trial SIR model, 131, 135 six degrees of separation, 125 small-world property, see also six degrees of separation social interaction, 125, 129 social network, 19 standard deviation, 34, 35 standard error, 36, 41 state space, 136, 137 statistical analysis, 49, 97 statistical significance, 41 statistics, 33, 35 descriptive, 33-35 summary, 34 steepest descent, 186 stock, 152, 154 systems thinking, 151, 153, 154 system dynamics, 151-154, 156 tabu search, 190 traffic models, see also queueing theory transition matrix, 141 transition probability, 135, 137, 139, 141 transition rate, see also transition probability trend impact fraction, 77 triple blind, see also blind clinical trial underdispersion, 41 utility function, 113, 114, 119, 120, 122 expected lifetime, 122 validation, 50 variance, 35 vertex (in graph theory), 126, 127 waitlist, see also queueing theory wait time, see also queueing theory, wait time Wiener process, 141 zero sum, 117

zero sum game, 119

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