

The award-winning story of how Rio's poor were robbed by the people who were supposed to run their hospitals (guest blog)

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One of my students here at the LSE is a Brazilian journalist who has just won the Tim Lopes Journalistic Prize for Investigative Reporting. Julio Lubianco was recognised for his radio investigation into corruption in the health services provided for the poor of Rio de Janeiro. Here he explains the story and how he revealed it. It included clever use of data investigation, leaking, and a lot of hard work.



The National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedics, Rio

From December 2012 to June 2013, I produced a six-piece series on how doctors from a public hospital were being paid for shifts they did not show up for. The stories were broadcasted by Radio CBN (Brazilian News Central), the biggest all-news radio network in the country. The National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedics (INTO, in the Portuguese acronym) is a highly specialized hospital located in Rio de Janeiro, funded by the federal government. It has a queue of 21,000 patients waiting for a surgery, which can take more than five years. Most of the patients are low income people who cannot afford private health insurance.

In 2010, the Ministry of Health established a programme of overtime payments to increase the productivity of federal hospitals. I began the investigation after the ministry had announced that he would double the resources for overtime payments in 2013 on that specific unit, in order to reduce the queue. Short after his announcement, I received an email sent by one member of the staff informing that there was no point in raising the payments, as the doctors did not work the extra hours.

From this tip, I started looking for information that could prove these allegations. The staff member who sent me the email helped me through this process, indicating the kind of documents that might be useful. Firstly, I discovered a collection of the hospital's annual reports, and compared the number of surgeries that took place before and after the payments. The comparison showed no improvement. After that, I used the Information Access Law to request the records of the working shifts, which were denied to me three times before I finally get them.

Using several Excel spreadsheets to analyse the data, I discovered that 10% of the staff earned 61% of the resources available for overtime. In some cases, the regular and the extra hours exceeded 60 hours a week. I also discovered that the directors and senior executives, who have administrative duties, were among those who were paid the most. Additionally, I crossed the list of doctors who earned overtime with the list of doctors that have performed surgeries, finding an average correspondence of 50% on four months the data was made available.

All six pieces produced for this series included stories of patients queuing for an operation, and how they had to adapt their lives while doing that. As the hospital offers orthopaedics surgeries, most patients had had broken bones, or displaced bones, and were not able to work. To look for these personal stories, I was helped by my fellow colleagues Olivia Haiad and Robson Sales.

After the disclosure of the information, the Ministry of Health ordered a review of all the shifts. Although their report stated that no irregularity was found, attendance is now being assessed electronically, to avoid fraud.

This links to the last story, where you can find the links for others on the bottom of the page: <http://goo.gl/eftHV>

This series won the 2014 Tim Lopes Journalistic Prize for Investigative Reporting, which is awarded since 2003 by a non-profit organization that collects anonymous information about crimes and shares them with the police. It is named after Tim Lopes, a journalist that was tortured and killed in 2002 when investigating the sexual exploitation of teenagers by drug dealers in Rio.

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