Health Care and Public Policy: an Australian analysis

Reviewed by M Avery

Bibliographic details:

This latest edition both updates the text and brings a strong discussion of health system developments in Australia and reforms across the last ten years. A major theme on the role of the Federal Government in health policy development nationally and regionally relates to Palmer and Short’s review and assessment of the reports and recommendations of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission delivered in 2009. Detail and thought has gone into the complex issues of the health reform agenda to date and the presentation of directions for policy formulation and implementation. The fourth edition includes new material on health financing, workforce, technology and health needs of disadvantaged groups in our community. The book includes a detailed updating and presentation of health data.

Across 11 chapters, the book provides information on the health services and system; articulates the need for health policy analysis at decision-making, process and structural levels; and sets out a direction for reform in health policy, service delivery and financing. The book is well set out and edited with each chapter providing definitions, explanations, content, summaries and evaluations, suggested further readings and discussion questions.

Key chapter themes include:
- Australian healthcare system;
- Public policy analysis and healthcare;
- Perspectives on health policy;
- Health insurance and the financing of health services;
- Organising healthcare services;
- Health workforce;
- Medical services and technological change;
- Public health;
- Health services for disadvantaged groups; and
- Reforming health policy-making, delivery and financing.

The book is a rich source of references to key reports and policies and includes an extensive bibliography of health-related published materials, details of web sites and an abbreviations list.

The authors have strong experience and understanding of health services public policy and commentary on the development and change of the system from both a national and international perspective. Professor Palmer is Emeritus Professor of Health Services Management at the University of New South Wales and Chair of the Advisory Board for Health Service Management at the University of Technology, Sydney. He has a distinguished career in learning and research in healthcare, with particular research achievements in policy analysis, funding, insurance and costing systems as well as patient classification systems. Professor Short has extensive experience in sociological aspects of healthcare, public policy and patient experience in healthcare systems. She is Associate Dean of Postgraduate Education in the Health Services Faculty at Sydney University and has held previous appointments at the University of Queensland and Griffith University.

The book provides contemporary and solid information and overview of the Australian healthcare system and the spectrum of delivery and financing arrangements. A deeper review and treatment of the current and future state of

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a mixed economy that involves government and non-government providers in hospital, community and social services would be valuable. There is a balance of material, insight and agenda-making for the majority of health delivery – this includes services across the health landscape and not just the acute care or hospital sector – hospitals, community health, aged care, disability and related services. A great strength of the book is the information, analysis and direction setting around the need for improvement in health policy-making. The commentary and astute observations on the inter-related development of policy, systems and services make for a valuable read and reference book. The style and approach that combine research, discussion and mapping of development direction are easy to follow and build the argument for improvement in health policy-making and its outcomes. A valuable part of this approach is the inclusion of ‘Policy Analysis’ sections to most chapters in the book. These are useful review pieces aimed at evaluation and setting the agenda in relation to specific service and system policy areas. Inclusion of such analysis in the area of policy management for health services for disadvantaged groups would have been valuable. The authors continue an argument from the earlier edition for stronger health policy development. They expand that in this book with direction on development approach and identification of some key future issues (quality of life in an ageing population, technology, workforce, costs and cost drivers) requiring treatment through comprehensive coverage and multidisciplinary frameworks.

The fourth edition is aimed at informing students, clinicians, managers and policymakers and the book will be valuable and useful to those learning about and contributing to Australian healthcare growth and development. With the federal elections over and central government returning to key issues of policy formation, resourcing and delivery, Palmer and Shorts’ fourth edition is a timely and useful contribution to current and future thinking.