The Unfulfilled Promise of Pay-for-Performance Policies in Health Care

Stephen B. Soumerai, Professor of Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute

The ongoing flip-flopping of research findings about the effects of medical or health policies weakens the credibility of health science among the general public, clinicians, and policy makers. Even worse, poorly designed studies, combined with widespread reporting on those studies by the news media, can distort the decisions of policy makers, leading them to fund ineffective, costly, or even harmful policies. This presentation focuses on widely accepted but questionably effective health policies that compensate physicians for meeting certain quality-of-care standards, such as measuring or treating high blood pressure. Health care systems worldwide have committed billions of dollars to this approach in the hope that financial incentives will improve the quality of health care. Although this monetary approach sounds good theoretically, international scientific reviews overwhelmingly find little evidence to support it. The presentation will also demonstrate how a pervasive bias can undermine the results of poorly designed studies of pay-for-performance programs, published in even the world’s leading medical journals. It will also point to strong observational study designs, randomised trials and systematic reviews of the total body of evidence to find more trustworthy conclusions on the efficacy of pay-for-performance.

When
Tuesday, 7 November, 4-6 pm, including refreshments at the conclusion of the seminar

Where
Level 6 Seminar Room, The Hub, Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney

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Presented by
Menzies Centre for Health Policy and the Centre of Research Excellence in Medicines and Ageing

About Stephen Soumerai

Stephen B. Soumerai is Professor of Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute, where he leads a research program on pharmaceutical outcomes, quality of health care and health policy evaluation. He also co-chaired the Statistics and Evaluative Sciences concentration within Harvard University’s health policy Ph.D. program for over 20 years, and continues as an active faculty member in the concentration. Dr Soumerai is well known for his work on the impacts of health policies and methods to improve the quality of medical practice. His recent research has addressed cost-related underuse of medications; as well as the impacts of drug coverage, FDA warnings and cost-containment policies on access to effective medications, quality and costs of care and clinical outcomes among vulnerable populations. Dr Soumerai’s work also focuses on common biases in research designs, the unreliability of health research, and improving the evidence base for health policies. Dr Soumerai has published numerous op-eds in leading news outlets, including VoxNews, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Newsweek, The Huffington Post, and Stat News on subjects including elimination of coverage gaps in the Medicare drug benefit, adverse consequences of rushed nationwide implementation of health IT, under treatment of pain, required drug coverage in Massachusetts health reform plans, state censorship of health research, poor efficacy of pay-for-performance policies, and arbitrary economic penalties for hospital readmissions.

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