



HEALTH SYSTEMS AND THEIR EVIDENCE BASED DEVELOPMENT

A Handbook for Teachers, Researchers and Health Professionals

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Preface

This book's title „Health Systems and Their Evidence Based Development” comprises some key features of health care in the 21st century:

1) The organisation of health care delivery is of utmost importance for the post-modern state in Europe and North-America as it is - in a different way - for the developing world. This is the case because of its economic importance signified by the spending of between 5 and 15% of the Gross Domestic Product for health but even more because of the growing relevance of excellent population health for economic development in low-tension open societies (1);

2) Modern health systems are not to be looked at as static structures, the best example being provided by the German Bismarckian System which maintained for more than hundred years i.e. since 1883, some essentials like the obligatory membership (up to an income threshold for high earners), a multiplicity of fee-based health insurances, and the sharing of the contributions between employers and employees (2). Today health care systems undergo continuous reform, mainly to curb expenditure but also to guaranty access and quality of service to everybody (see for example the Dubrovnik Pledge of the Ministers of Health in South East Europe in 2001 (3) or the conclusions at the Ljubljana Conference in 1996 (4)). One example of this is the existence of long waiting queues for specific operations for hip or knee replacements in the tax-based Beveridge Systems especially in northern Europe.

3) Health systems reform and development, however, require thorough scientific analysis to identify the options available to the politician. The term coined for this demand in today's discussion refers to the evidence base of decision making (see WHO-EURO 2003 (5)). Unfortunately still the reform legislation in most countries orients towards the uni-dimensional consideration of financial constraints, missing the chance of exploring real improvement and instead modifying repeatedly the various models of co-payment.

4) The title refers implicitly to a comparative approach between national health systems. Especially in Europe with her different historical lines of development this is an essential element if the European unification process is taken into account. Only recently the European High Court has issued strategic decisions on the universal access to health care in the European Union wherever a patient seeks care and wherever she or he is insured. A public health mandate of the European Commission has been formulated already in the Maastricht treaty of 1992 (6). Converging trends can also be recognized with regard to the development of „mixed” systems containing elements of the Bismarck as well as of the Beveridge model.

As this handbook is devoted to all teachers, researchers, postgraduate students and professionals in the health field the question arises who in the end is responsible for the organization and further development of the health system. The answer can only be that this field is essentially characterized by multi-professionality and inter-disciplinarity comprising all parties including the patients and the population themselves. However, the steering of such systems, the balancing of input and output, and their evaluation are mainly considered to be subject to the health sciences, i.e. a part of the public health. Therefore it is not by chance, that this handbook has been developed in the context of a Research & Development project in order to enable and improve the teaching for research and practice in Public Health: The Public Health Collaboration in South Eastern Europe (PH-SEE), funded since the year 2000 by the Stability Pact through the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). On the PH-SEE website (7) maintained by the Andrija Štampar School of Public Health in Zagreb, Croatia, the abstracts of teaching modules in a number of public health fields can directly be accessed like „Methods and Tools in Health Sciences”, „Determinants of Health”, „Disease Prevention and Health Promotion”, „Health Care and Health Services” or „Public Health Strategies” and in addition the chapters of this handbook in full text.

This handbook is likely to be the first compendium on the main issues in evidence based health systems development with a focus on the situation and the experience in South Eastern Europe, and more general in all of the former socialist economies in transition, most of them in a process of accession to the European Union.

The book comprises three main chapters: (1.0) Health Systems Analysis, (2.0) Health Systems Management and (3.0) Health Policy. This agenda describes the full cycle of scientific analysis and evaluation, the operational steering of the system, and the developmental aspects of change and reform. Within these three sections the reader finds basic texts in the format of teaching modules including exercises for students and reference material, complemented by case studies for study work. Deliberately the conceptual approach of this handbook goes beyond the usual listing of topics to be dealt with in teaching public health as it is obvious that most readers would expect and need more than a reference to knowledge and expertise elsewhere. Thus the volume can be used as a teaching book as well as a compendium or handbook in the field. It corresponds to a total student workload of 12 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and its contents may be combined with other modules. Other handbooks will follow this first edition covering the areas listed above as on the website (7).

Finally as the principle investigators of the Public Health

Collaboration in South Eastern Europe we have to express our sincerest thanks to the editors and authors for their dedication and patience and an enormous amount of unpaid work, which gave this endeavour a special flavour and unique value. May this cooperative work also serve as an example for a brighter future in a war-torn region and the re-establishment of cooperation and peace building, collegiality and togetherness in the service to the people.

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