

Preface

This book of essays reflects my interest in exposing both fads, fallacies and foolishness in the health policy and management literature. No one in medical care can miss the onslaught of claims about reforming modern medicine. How doctors should be paid, how hospitals should be governed, organized, and financed, how much patients should pay when sick in co-payments, how the quality of care could be improved, and how governments and other buyers could better control the costs of care — all find expression in the explosion of medical care conference proceedings, op-ends, news bulletins, journal articles, and books. This collection of articles takes up a key set of what I regard as particularly misleading fads and fashions. In selecting them for book publication, I used as a criterion how much an idea contributed to misunderstandings in contemporary discussions of how to organize, deliver, finance, pay for, and regulate medical care services in modern industrial democracies.

Each of the essays in the book takes up major examples of fads in the management and policy literature. In the case of management, the fads dissected include the faith in marketing nostrums, the celebration of integrated delivery systems, and enthusiasm for simpleminded clichés like management by objective. The topic of “managed care” justified a chapter, given just how confused and confusing this faddish notion was in the 1990s.

The policy chapters addressed four fads: the celebration of explicit rationing as a major cost control instrument, the belief in a “basic package” of health insurance benefits to constrain costs, the faith that contemporary cross-national research can deliver a large number of transferable models, and the belief that broadening the definition of what is meant by health will constitute some sort of useful advance in practice.

Each of these chapters, separately published, critically reviews ideas that health care managers, policy makers, and students will have read about in the literature of the past decade or more.

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