

Wise planning

Assessment and planning in health programs

Hodges BC and Videto DM

Jones and Barlett, 2005

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PLANNING IS AN ESSENTIAL PART of modern organisations and is integral to the role of a health service manager. The planning activity emerges as a consequence of the need to contain costs, manage health outcomes, and be held accountable for the effective, efficient and equitable provision of health services. Amidst the challenge to operate within the current resource (ie, financial, human and time) capacity there is an imperative to explore and develop innovative service delivery models to meet increased demand and expectations. Therefore, textbooks on the subject of planning in health-related topic areas are a valuable resource in these very challenging times in health care.

The particular textbook under review, *Assessment and planning in health programs*, is a 2005 American publication by Hodges and Videto. My overall assessment is that this publication is more than a textbook — it may be used as a study guide or workbook since it includes a number of vignettes containing review questions described in the textbook as “checkpoints” and “boxes” in addition to the typical end-of-chapter questions and exercises. An additional design feature of the book which further adds to its utility is the extent of practical advice and demonstration of theoretical principles in the form of relevant health issues and case studies which are woven through a number of chapters in the book.

The textbook consists of nine chapters and three appendices, totalling 200 pages. The chapters are organised according to the key phases in planning methodology. They include: “Needs assessment: the big picture”; “Paint a picture of your target population: assessing assets and problems”; “Identifying and writing mission statements, goals and objectives”; “Program planning: the big picture”; “Identi-

fying strategies and activities”; “The importance and use of theories in health education and health promotion”; “Data collection strategies for needs assessments and evaluations”; “Program evaluation: background and basics”; “Evaluation structure and design”. The appendices expand on particular aspects of these topics, covering: responsibility and competency areas related to needs assessment, program planning and implementation; a social and health assessment; and a sample moderator script for a focus group interview.

In terms of a critique I make two points. Firstly, the book has a strong emphasis on health education which is not reflected in its book title. While education is an important approach to health planning, it does not represent the extent of actions and

strategies that may be adopted to address health issues. Secondly, the overall content suggests that the same old principles surrounding health planning still apply with little change in the advice for achieving a successful program outcome. While one might argue that this weakens the value of the text, it may suggest that in spite of past advice, the application of planning approaches and principles has not been satisfactory and the release of a new publication on some “old” principles serves to reiterate

the importance of them and provides a timely refresher!!

My general assessment is that this textbook is very readable and would be suitable at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It's a great all-rounder and likely to be regularly taken off the book shelf for those who regularly engage in program planning (to either teach it or to use it to develop program proposals). I certainly will purchase a personal copy of this textbook and will be incorporating some of its content into the health planning subject I teach.

Reviewer rating: ★★★★★

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