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-