

Book reviews

Redefining health care: creating value-based competition on results

Porter ME and Teisberg EO

Harvard Business School Press, 2006

ISBN: 1 5913 9778 2. RRP: \$55, xvii + 506 pages

THIS BOOK PROVIDES readers with a salient insight into the failings of the United States health care system. The authors, who come from strategy and innovation backgrounds, provide an interesting plan and argument for revitalising the US health care system through value-based competition.

The first three chapters provide excellent reading on health reform and why there is a crisis in the cost, provision and quality of health care in the US. In chapter four, the authors introduce the reader to the concept of value-based competition. Porter and Teisberg suggest that the current US health care system is based on “zero-sum” competition as the system is contingent on shifting costs, restricting patient choice and services and increasing the bargaining power of insurers. What the authors advocate as an alternative model is “positive-sum” competition based on improving value for customers and the quality of products or services relative to their price. The latter third of the book concentrates on implications for health care providers, health plans, suppliers, consumers and employers. These chapters are well written and provide an in-depth analysis of changes

that are needed at each level of the health care system to reinvigorate and add value back into the system.

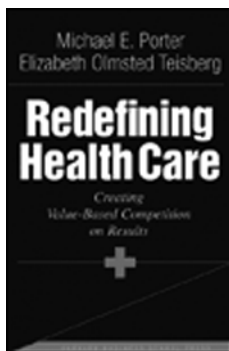
In chapter eight, the authors examine the role of government in creating the conditions and framework for competition. While concentrating heavily on the US experience, the authors argue that, as government's have a major influence on health care systems, there are lessons in the book for health reform and policy directions in other countries.

Overall the book is easy to read, provides in-depth analysis of the shortcomings of the US health care system and provides a coherent argument for an alternative model. The level of analysis may be excessive for some readers; however, the text would appeal to those wanting a deeper understanding of the US health care system. Additionally, the text provides a great basis for a case study of the shortcomings of a highly privatised health care system or policy failures in health service delivery.

Reviewer rating: ★★ ★

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Smart thinking

Allen M

2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 2006

ISBN: 0 1955 1733 4. RRP: \$42.95. xx + 193 pages

YEARS AGO, logic was either a subject in high school or taught as a part of the English syllabus, along with grammar. Now, both seem to have disappeared from schools. Matthew Allen, the author of *Smart thinking*, calls “critical thinking” informal logic, and says that it is rarely studied or taught in Australia. This 2006 edition contains additional insights from teaching critical thinking since the book was first published in 1997. It has ten short, readable chapters within its 190 pages, each with practical exercises and a review. There is a ten-page alphabet “glossary of key terms and concepts” at the end of the book that explains simply terms such as “circular reasoning”, “claims”, “premises” and “sub-arguments”.

It would be easy as a busy health professional to dismiss the book as “too easy”, and “I know all that”. But, often, everyday professional language avoids clarity, is imprecise, full of jargon, and our arguments are sometimes not well founded. The book contains guidance for thinking critically about language, communication and writing. For example, the two chapters on more effective reasoning provide tips to strengthen the use of

claims in arguments and explanations. The chapters give readers tools to write clear claims, understand their key properties, and to check assumptions and avoid implied premises. The chapter on research, reasoning and analysis is particularly useful as it provides an analytical structure for how to make sense of assembled research and information to prepare a cohesive argument. This can be a daunting task and is made easier by following some simple steps explained very clearly and logically.

The book has many purposes and audiences. It would be handy for health professionals when faced with writing a persuasive proposal or policy, a literature review, a thesis for a university degree, or in preparing a program to present to a management team or board of directors. As the basis of the book is an Applied Reasoning course at Curtin University, it is an invaluable text for students to absorb skills in critical thinking and approaches to understanding and writing. I will be recommending it for our higher degree research students.

Reviewer rating: ★★★★★

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