

Health Policy in the Market State

Linda Hancock (Editor)

Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, xviii+343pp. \$39.95 (Paperback)

Linda Hancock risks underselling *Health Policy in the Market State* in her introduction by positioning this as a text for students in the health sciences, social welfare and public policy. This is arguably equally essential reading for anyone working in or close to the health sector in Victoria who is seeking either an introduction to the underpinnings of contemporary policy and practice or who is looking for a framework to enable critical reflection with the daily realities. The comprehensive list of references is, on its own, an asset, but there is much to be gained by actually reading on. This is a very readable text, written by some key voices in the health sector who come from a range of academic, service delivery and government perspectives.

Compendiums about health policy in a rapidly changing world can very quickly become reassigned to being history books, and while *Health Policy in the Market State* undoubtedly chronicles the underpinnings of Victoria's health sector, perhaps an even more useful contribution is the framework for analysing health policy presented in Chapter 2 "Policy, power and interests". For example, while this text was published prior to the introduction of Primary Care Partnerships, one could certainly identify some principles and issues for inclusion in a critique of this latest policy initiative. Further, the conceptual underpinnings of the analytical framework potentially make this a worthwhile text for those concerned with health policy else where in Australia and perhaps even beyond our shores.

Many of the subsequent chapters present case studies which demonstrate some of the issues of policy in practice on topics such as health financing, service provision, the needs of different groups and performance indicators. While one might not necessarily agree with some of the views put forward, the various authors certainly ask many of the critical questions which should be asked of policy, especially in its implementation, and in doing so provide pointers which could readily be addressed to other health programs.

Traditionally, there has been much policy analysis about the machinations of the government and bureaucracy. Therefore, a very welcome aspect to this book is the premise that good policy is only that which works for the interests of consumers, ie linking health policy with questions of citizenship.

In summary, this is a book that asks questions that need to be asked, and is reasonably accessible. Like a good entrée, it whets the appetite and leaves the reader thinking about the challenges to come.

Beth R Crisp
Australian Institute for Primary Care
La Trobe University
Bundoora, Victoria, 3086
AUSTRALIA