

HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
Policy Cases and the Case Method

ROY PENCHANSKY, EDITOR

Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1968,
xix + 460 pp. \$12.50.

This is an interesting, provocative and exasperating volume. The dust jacket describes it as the first of a series of case studies on policy issues in health services administration.

The 12 cases selected are interesting from the historical point of view and as examples of the complexity of forces affecting the outcome of a particular problem. They are provocative because they force one to speculate whether the outcome would have been any different had the sequence of events been otherwise and the personalities and motivations different. They are exasperating because although the editor stresses that the objective of the case method is to develop in students problem-solving and decision-making skills, the ability to synthesize and apply theory to specific problems, skills in group process and verbal communication and an action orientation, he seems to feel that these skills can only be achieved in the classroom. But as Penchansky points out, the achievement of these skills should be independent of the particular case being analyzed. If this is true, a general approach to the analysis may be found. The potential use of the volume outside the classroom would be enhanced if the editor gave some guidelines to the principles of analyses—perhaps in the form of questions that should be answered for every case.

The cases deal with cooperative planning for a new school of nursing, planning for inpatient psychiatric services in a general hospital, the development and decline of the Massachusetts Health

Protection Clinics, the Massachusetts Public Assistance Experience in attempting to control drug costs and the unionization of hospitals in New York City. A number of cases deal with the interaction between the professions, the community and government as related to efforts to develop new forms for the delivery of medical care. The Saskatchewan experience setting forth the physician response to a governmental health plan and the Russelton experience with group practice are particularly interesting in this regard. The problems of planning for the health services of an entire country are well set forth in the discussion of the health services of Chile and in the article on the National Health Services in Great Britain.

The cases are well organized beginning with the general basis for the program and progressing to the administrative structure, the operation of the program, and the interaction among the various parties concerned. Care has been taken not to overwhelm the reader with minutiae. Where statistical and cost data are relevant they are usually presented in an appendix so as not to interrupt the flow of thought. The editor states in the preface that an effort has been made to insure a comprehensive description, to minimize the writers' opinions and conclusions, to provide an identified source for all opinions stated and, where possible, to obtain descriptions as to what happened and how it happened rather than solely why people say it happened. By and large, the editor has succeeded.

The final section of the book deals with the case method as such. Here the editor presents his philosophy on the purpose and nature of the case method. He stresses that the case itself is far less important to the success of the case method than the interaction between student and instructor. To the degree that the instructor involves the student in the process of analysis he may be considered successful. "It must be the students who attempt to delimit the problems or issues for discussion. To tell them the questions to be discussed and what is important in the case does not provide exercise in the development of their ability to perceive and to define problems nor an atmosphere in which they feel they have free range for thinking."

A brief discussion of course development, an essay on terminology and an appendix on the use of the case method in teaching public health administration complete the book.

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