Perspectives on health and social policy

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Where are we going in US policy-making?

- Combined impact of welfare reform and recession just arriving
- Immigration policy/attitude influenced by perceptions of terrorism
- Health issues falling into background

The potential in health

- Slow incrementalism in spending
  - Rx drugs
  - Special group coverage
  - Support for research
- Resurgence of interest in public health
Goals of current policy making

- Correct for overly generous history?
- Improve financial status of those in control?
- Enforce fundamentalist moral codes?
- Balance competing interests fairly?

Questions during this course:

- What policies have positive impact?
- What policies have negative impact?
- What policy conflicts affect our ability to improve health?
- What do I want to do to have an impact on policies?

What is policy?

- A decision on how to allocate resources to accomplish a purpose
- Ideally, deliberately adopted after a review of alternatives, and it is intended to be followed.
### What is health policy?
- Decisions that support health
- Decisions to respond when health is threatened
- Decisions to treat or cure illness
- Decisions on who will benefit
- Decisions on how to organize and pay for benefits

### What is social policy?
- Decisions about community
  - education
  - work
  - housing
  - recreation
- Decisions that affect how groups relate to one another
- Decisions about economic welfare

### Other countries
- Achieve universal coverage
- Use various combinations of
  - taxation
  - regulation
  - organization
- Spend less and achieve higher health status
Comparing Health Systems*

- Basic Policy (scope & goal)
- Organizational Structure
- Economic Support
- Staffing
- Facilities
- Supplies
- Delivery Patterns
- Preventive Services
- Regulations

* Adapted from Roemer. Comparative Health Systems

Perspectives on policy--the actors

- the general welfare or the body politic
- the intended beneficiaries
- the stated beneficiaries
- the managers or organizers
- the decision-makers

Perspectives on policy--time and place

- time
  - immediate
  - short term
  - long term
- place
  - neighborhood
  - city
  - state
  - region
  - nation
  - global
**Perspectives on politics**

- Distribution of power in a system
- Define participants
- Set agenda
- Limit solutions

**Ways to influence policy**

- Choose policy-makers (VOTE!)
- Provide information
- Expect information
- Practice setting
- Professional association
- Interest association
- Party politics

**Vulnerable population**

- a group that is for some reason at higher risk of problems
- not all members of the identified population will experience the problem
- others outside the population will experience the problem
Possible reasons for vulnerability

- Social prejudice
  - racism
  - age-ism
  - able-ism
  - genderism
- geography
- economics

Health is a product of

- genetics
- social environment
- physical environment
- behaviors
- diseases
- medical care

Select populations tracked in HP2010

- Race/Ethnicity
- Gender
- SES
- People with disabilities
If you are in a vulnerable population you are

- More likely to be dependent on public programs for some necessities
- More likely to lack insurance
- More likely to experience barriers to care
- More likely to be sicker and die younger

Impact of welfare reform

- In 1995, 88% of poor children received food stamps; in 1998, 70%
- From 1995-1997, average incomes of poorest 20% of female headed families fell
  - 2 million families, 6 million people
  - drop of $580 per family; below 3/4 of poverty line

Income disparity

- Top 1% of population (2.7 million people) have as much to spend as the bottom 40% of the population (100 million people)
- The top 1/5 of the population has 50.4% of income.
- The top 1/5 has had a 15% income increase; the bottom 1/5 only 10%
Public coverage for children

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<th>Year</th>
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Percentage of Medicare Recipients, by age

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
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<td>85 and up</td>
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Barriers to universality in US

- American enterprise
- Incrementalism
- Political history
Possible forces for change

- Balancing cost, quality and access
- The public’s role
- Economics

Healthy People 2010

Goals
Health Status
Determinants of Health
Policy

What do you do?

- In planning clinical practice?
- In choosing a practice setting?
- In carrying out professional roles?
- As a member of the community?
Remember . . .

Significant problems we face cannot be solved with the same level of thinking we were at when we created them*

*Attributed to Einstein