

Preface

This is an important and timely book. As health care costs soar, there is increasing interest in examining what society and particularly patients receive in return for these expenditures. *Optimizing Health* brings together the best thinking from both sides of the Atlantic to explore these issues. It employs disciplinary perspectives from economics, ethics, philosophy, psychology, clinical practice, and epidemiology to explore various ways by which the value for patients have and can be determined. It concludes with a discussion of changes required in practice, research, and health care systems to maximize the outcomes received from the provision of medical care services from the patient's perspective.

The first section of the book provides theoretical perspectives from economics and systems thinking that help us to focus on how one might determine the value of medical care for patients. The next section considers the ethical and philosophical dilemmas that face developed countries in distributing medical care. How is justice served and evidence-based medicine employed to increase the value of medical care for patients?

The section on psychology deals with measuring outcomes from the patient's perspective and involving patients in medical decision making. Measuring quality of life and gaining valid quality of life information when patients cannot respond for themselves are important topics covered by these chapters. Other chapters consider ways that patients can become more involved in medical decision making with the expectation that it will increase the value of medical care for patients.

A major section of the book about clinical practice discusses problems that can reduce the value to patients of medical care. The problems discussed include overdiagnosis, aggressive treatments that do not result in better patient outcomes, findings that an early diagnosis does not always result in a better outcome, and the extent of medical error in treatment.

The final sections deal with cost-effectiveness analyses and applications of clinical epidemiology. The chapters include a number of original investigations and applications of new methodologies. All-in-all, the volume is must reading for

practitioners, policy makers, and researchers who want to find in one place the state-of-the-art thinking and future directions of valuing medical care from the patient's perspective.

Ronald Andersen
Wasserman Professor Emeritus
Departments of Health Services and Sociology
University of California School of Public Health Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California, USA