

Supplementary care in Brazil: dynamics, practices and trends

A number of premises have guided the approach to this equally complex and controversial subject. The first one was to gather contributions from researchers with different origins, perspectives and methodological traditions. The second was to map the extension and characteristics of this segment to provide elements for a reflection about the configuration of the Brazilian health system as a whole. In addition we have put forth efforts to select papers dealing with both the macro-social sphere and the practices in the micro-social environment. This choice could have put us at risk of not getting to the bottom of these questions but on the other hand it allowed avoiding an excessively theoretical discussion. We believe to have met our objective thanks to the efforts of all those who cooperated in this delicate, long and demanding task called academic publishing to whom we are immensely grateful.

The number begins with a courageous discussion around the unification of the public system and the expansion of the supplementary care segment, followed by a section of articles starting with a seminal analysis situating the growth of the supplementary segment in the context of the more general process of capitalist economic reproduction. It continues with a descriptive approach to the importance and characteristics of this segment and with a group of papers about regulation policies, complemented by a study into the public-private mix in the offer, utilization and financing of the health care services.

After the section dedicated to the macro-social sphere the journal presents a group of different studies investigating the impact of these questions upon the care model, the practices of care providers and upon the experiences of the users. Subjects such as procedures and perceptions of professionals and groups acting in the health plan market, factors associated with the use of clinical guidelines and incorporation of new service modalities like home health care are approached. A few papers deal with care models and one approaches the preoccupying rates of cesarean birth characteristic for this segment. Two studies introduce innovating subjects - one of them investigating therapeutic itineraries and the other imaginaries of the professional practice - since, although occurring in determinate economical and social macro-contexts, the health-disease-care processes also involve an important subjective and cultural dimension.

The section "Opinion" focuses on the consolidation of the financial capital in the 90s with the imposed repositioning of the medical-industrial complex, and on the challenges these processes represent for the regulatory agencies and for changes in the technical care model.

The section "Book reviews" organized by Professor Consuelo Sampaio Meneses suggests some reading matter for deepening the questions around the public and the private in the health field such as the ambiguous character of these categories over the history, the dynamics in the Brazilian reality, the political course dependence and institutional dualism of health care and the phenomenon called "technological transition" in the supplementary sector.

Thus, by mapping and systemizing the diversity of existing studies, we hope to have helped bringing up to date a debate we believe to be indispensable for granting and defending the Unified Health System as such.

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Guest editors