

RAYNALD PINEAULT, MD, Ph.D

UNDERSTANDING HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS FOR IMPROVED MANAGEMENT



This book is derived from an edition first published in French as *Comprendre le système de santé pour mieux le gérer*, © Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2012, 2014.

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ESKA PUBLISHING, © 2015
ISBN 978-2-747-2234-1

Consultant for USA:
ESKA Publishing
Paul Lipscomb
3808 SW Dosch Road
Portland, Oregon 97239 - USA
<http://www.eska.fr>

Preface

In the United States, area-wide health planning has been replaced by hospital- or health system-based strategic management. The institutional planning machinery established by the National Health Planning and Human Resources Development Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-641) is virtually extinct (Rodwin, 1984). The local and regional health plans produced in the late 1970s and 1980s resemble museum exhibits that can be found in libraries, but few managers know much about community health planning; indeed the practice is rare. While some may celebrate the retreat of health planning as the triumph of institution-based strategic management, others lament the capacity of renowned health care institutions to understand changing community needs. This capacity will grow increasingly important in the future because hospitals and other health care institutions will be held accountable for many dimensions of population health. They will therefore have to strengthen their capacity for community needs assessment and health systems management.

Enter Raynald Pineault. As a widely respected teacher, former Chair of the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine and former Associate Dean for Public Health at Université de Montréal, Dr. Pineault has influenced generations of students in community and preventive medicine. He has inspired them to think more broadly about the nature of health care systems and how they can be redesigned to improve access

and quality of health care services for the populations that need them. In this book, Pineault elucidates what he has done throughout his professional career. For students and managers new to the health sector, he defines critical concepts and introduces the reader to language that pervades the world of health policy and management. The overarching conceptual framework that guides the book draws on the seminal work of Avedis Donabedian professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, particularly his book, *Aspects of Medical Care Administration* (1973).

Practitioners in the field, and all those who come to health care from business, public administration or the broader nonprofit sector, face a bewildering set of indicators, for example – standardized mortality ratios, disability-free life expectancy, health-adjusted life expectancy, incidence and prevalence rates, relative risk. Moreover, there are recurring concepts and a distinctive vocabulary that pervades discussion among clinicians, managers and policymakers, for example – needs and unmet needs, utilization and productivity, continuity, comprehensiveness, integration, primary care, social insurance, efficacy, effectiveness, outcome assessment, performance management. Pineault argues that a deeper understanding of health care systems requires versatility with these indicators, concepts and vocabulary, which will, in turn, improve the capacity of health care managers to meet the challenges faced by health care systems in the United States, Canada, Europe, as well as developing nations.

One of the earliest ideas of community planning, in the United States, was that health is a « community affair » (National Commission on Community Health Services, 1967). Now, in the second decade of the new millennium, hospitals are increasingly encouraged to forge stronger links with their communities, to show evidence of « community benefit » and how they contribute to population health. President Obama's Accountable Care Act provides federal funding for providers to create Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) that define populations for which they are prepared to work together to coordinate care services and « share savings. » This is but one example of how institutional strategic management is taking up well-known planning ideas and methods that continue to have relevance to the challenges faced by health

care systems around the world. In an age of increasing availability of information (« big data ») and increasing demands on health care institutions to perform, it is critical for all those working in the health care sector to understand its unique characteristics.

I believe that Pineault has made an important contribution in developing this textbook to explain the nature of key indicators, concepts and vocabulary that permeate health systems analysis. The book is concise and clear. Since it can be used as a self-teaching guide, as well as in formal course or e-courses – both at undergraduate and graduate levels – it is likely to raise the quality of technical understanding and deliberation in a field characterized by contentious arguments among powerful stakeholders across the health care sector.

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