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Just Health Care?

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Medical Egalitarianism and Patients' Prior Consent

It has been argued that medical egalitarianism, i.e. the principle of equal health care for equal medical needs, can not be justified, since poor patients would prefer *less* health care and *more* consumption of other commodities. However, the relevance of this argument must be questioned. Even if all poor persons, *isolated*, would prefer to shift part of their health care to other consumption, all poor persons could prefer medical egalitarianism above the alternative that would be the outcome if *all* poor persons made such shifts. A person's preference in the *isolated* choice of the person's own consumption could differ from the person's preference in the *social* choice between different health care allocations, since there are important externalities of health care consumption, and since a person could have preferences for other persons' health care, even if the person's own consumption is not influenced.