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Just Health Care?

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The significance of the goal of health care for the setting of priorities

Should health care take account of all sorts of suffering that it could relieve or only some sorts? Should a treatment that increases quality of life but not survival be considered effective? These are central issues in a situation of scarcity where priorities must be established. The answers presuppose, however, an understanding of the more fundamental issue of the goal of health care.

The purpose of the paper is to emphasise the significance of a clarified goal of health care for the setting of priorities. Three arguments are explored. First, we do not know to what extent the activities of various actors in health care are co-ordinated. It is common knowledge that successful teamwork requires an understanding of a common goal.

Second, in order to use resources efficiently it is necessary to assess the effects of health care. It is not, then, a question only of assessing *that* there is an effect but also of assessing that there is the *right* effect. And what constitutes the right effect can only be determined in relation to the goal of the enterprise.

Third, assessment of needs becomes necessary in so far as the principle of need should guide the priority-setting. The concept of health care need includes a goal component. This component should for rational reasons be identical with the goal of health care.