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Rehabilitation in Germany: is it efficient, is it fair?

In most if not all European countries there are increasing budget restrictions in health care. In Germany, the expenditure of statutory pension insurances for rehabilitative services has been lawfully limited by the “Growth and Employment Promotion Act” (Wachstums- und Beschäftigungsförderungsgesetz WFG) from 1997. Under these general conditions, proofs of effectiveness and esp. efficiency gain more and more relevance for allocative decision-making in the rehabilitative health care system. At the same time the decisions made within this framework require an ethical justification. The system of rehabilitation has to be “efficient” as well as “just”.

In this contribution, we present results of an interdisciplinary study on the modes of allocation of public rehabilitative resources in Germany in relation to ethical deliberations about distributive justice. A short overview over the structure of the German system of rehabilitation and the main levels, mechanisms, instruments, and criteria of the patient-selection or allocation of means, respectively, will be given. And subsequently, some ethical and economical implications will be analysed and contrasted. One of the most significant issues is the relation between the statutory anchored occupational rehabilitation and other possible goals of rehabilitation, as they may appear from an over-all societal view. Is the primacy of the ability to work reasonable?