

HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND HEALTH
POLICY TODAY: A MULTIFACETED VIEW OF THEIR
UNSTABLE CROSSROADS

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HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND HEALTH POLICY TODAY: A MULTIFACETED VIEW OF THEIR UNSTABLE CROSSROADS

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Foreword

A foreword is meant to lend credibility to a book. In this case, it's the other way around: the book gives credibility to the foreword, since it has been written by distinguished and well-known practitioners and academics of health technology assessment, among them some of the founding fathers who have contributed to the consolidation of this multidisciplinary endeavour during the last 40 years and keep showing here how aware they are of the many challenges to overcome: David Banta, Anthony Culyer, Michael Drummond and Joan Rovira.

A foreword should deal with the genesis and purpose of the book. I acknowledge my indebtedness with my two distinguished colleagues, friends and long-time partners, Carlos Campillo and Juan del Llano, when they proposed to publish the book in the collection Health Economics and Health Services Management. A collection promoted by the Research Center on Health and Economics at University Pompeu Fabra (CRES-UPF) during the last 15 years with its titles published by Masson, Springer-Verlag, Elsevier and, lately, by Springer Ibérica under a Creative Commons license. I can't imagine a better and more relevant book for this 30th title, an auspicious milestone.

To the best of my knowledge, Carlos Campillo and Juan del Llano, have successfully developed what they stated as the intention of the book about one year ago:

“A sweeping wealth of documents dealing with HTA has been published over the last three decades. HTA allegedly is one of the bedrocks of regulation and medical decision making. However, countervailing visions contend that geographical variations in the role that HTA is actually playing among countries pinpoints specific room for improvement.

Given our social preferences, cherry-picking HTA's features and successes over the last decades moves it away from its possibility frontier. The time has come for it to take a renewed stronghold. Insufficient resources, delays in assessment, inadequate priority setting, regulatory capture, public distrust, actual influence on regulatory decisions, the need for strengthening international cooperation and harmonisation, and lack of assessments of surgical innovations stand as some of the most salient hindrances that HTA faces in several countries to make headway toward its consolidation as an efficient tool for regula-

tion and decision making.” Progress has been made, but there are still obstacles, circumstances and economic, social and political conditions that have irreversibly changed in many areas. The book tries to flee from both conformist approaches, not uncommon and useless, and maverick positions. HTA itself is just another technology that shall be scrutinised. “This book disentangles these and other issues in connection with the advancement of HTA and its interface with health policy. It highlights the factors that should shape its progress in the near future. Interdisciplinary and critical views from a number of professionals are put together in a prescient order to cast some light and make recommendations as to the next steps HTA should take to fit for purpose.”

Each of the nine chapter titles accurately describes its content and scope and each text closes with conclusions or wrap-ups and advancement proposals. The title of the third chapter, “The wisdom tooth of HTA”, is more intriguing until you start reading it (no clues here) and realise its contribution in helping to obtain the greatest health gains within financial constraints, and informing decision makers on how to balance the pressures of demand and supply for new technologies within a health-system budget by grounding decisions in a clear, transparent and coordinated process. Or shall we let the individual alone in a stratified society where the few – those that can afford it – would pay for any technology without considerations of effectiveness, and the rest will remain in the outer darkness? The book’s authors recognise the difficulties of making decisions in the midst of conflict, but they teach us how to deal with the fog of war at any stage: the intelligence phase, universal and falsifiable knowledge on HTA, the decision phase, contingent policy decisions, the implementation phase – requiring soundness and legitimacy – and the evaluation phase, where population again has the last word. Prevention of bad health and inefficiency does not depend on increased regulation, but on better regulation.

All chapters are policy oriented and addressed to an international audience of health authorities, regulators, policy makers, health service professionals and managers, and healthcare industry stakeholders, particularly those of the medical devices and pharmaceutical sector, where the full blown value-based pricing should be fostered without forgetting any longer diagnostic tests and surgical innovations. Every reader has their own point of view and preferences – chapters can be read in any order – and everyone would pick their favourite but would surely appreciate all. Enjoy!

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