A New Private Option?  
The Argument for Private Nonprofit Medical Governance

WASHINGTON D.C. — Though the U.S. does not have universal health care, the government still makes decisions that fundamentally affect the quality and accessibility of medical care. The Veterans Administration, Medicare, Medicaid, funding health services research, regulating private group health insurance, and controlling entry into health-related professions are just a few of the examples of government involvement. However, very few studies have been undertaken on medical governance to examine what practices might be the most effective.

In Medical Governance, David Weimer explores an alternative regulatory approach to medical care based on the delegation of decisions about the allocation of scarce medical resources to private nonprofit organizations instead of exclusively public or private for-profit governance arrangements. He investigates the specific development of rules for the U.S. organ transplant system and details the conversion of a voluntary network of transplant centers to one private rulemaker: the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN). Weimer argues that the OPTN provides a framework for actually implementing evidence-based medicine, facilitating the combination of statistical evidence with the tacit knowledge of practitioners to develop rules that not only allocate extremely valuable resources but promote effective treatment.

Amid the debates over the restructuring of the U.S. health care system, Eric Patashnik of the University of Virginia believes that “Weimer’s thoughtful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of alternative medical governance models could not be more timely.” Finding the OPTN to be more efficient, nimble, and better at making evidence-based decisions than a public agency — and more protective of accountability and the public interest than private for-profit organizations — Weimer’s findings could have broader implications for medical governance. For example, similar governance arrangements could apply to other areas of medicine, including medical records and the control of Medicare expenditures.

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