

they are involved in treating and/or researching. This monograph provides health policy makers and planners with the background information to monitor, plan and treat the coming wave of second primary cancers that will be diagnosed in the future in today's patients.

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Constructive conversations about health: policy and values

Edited by M Marinker. Radcliffe Publishing, Oxford, 2006, pp 248, £29.95 (paperback) ISBN 101-84619-033-9

Health has multiple meanings—those constructed by medical professionals, governments and their representatives, multilateral agencies and their employees and, not least, by those touched by medical and public health schemes. These visions frequently differ, as a range of collective and individual priorities and calculations affect policy making, the implementation of projects and their reception in society in myriad ways. Visible in all geographical, social and political contexts, these trends are often downplayed by commentators working with an agenda to present health-related activity as something requiring centralised planning and direction. What such sanitized and predetermined descriptions often lack is a detailed assessment of how communities can actually participate in and thereby strengthen medical and public health campaigns; such accounts, whatever their provenance, need to be questioned and corrected.

This edited collection of papers is valuable precisely as it enlivens us to a wide range of perspectives and possibilities. Health, as the editor and many contributors point out, is integral to people's lives and has the potential of making an enormous difference in many ways. Discussions around health hold out, for instance, the potential to democratize societies, which is to be welcomed in contexts in which the free, fair and universal election of governments is still a distant possibility. These conversations

about health can also bring about higher levels of social activism among diverse communities, which can and should be deeply instructive to government and non-governmental organisations working in their midst. That this often does not happen is something that shines through in several articles, which highlight the significance of trying not to fall prey to meaningless technical jargon that haunts many of the documents released by agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and the day to day work of departments of many United Nations' agencies. In these publications, real human voices are frequently drowned by unfathomable economic theories and terms that make sense to only a small clutch of people, often distantly removed from the locations where day to day health-related work is being carried out. The fact that policies are affected by continual change, as they are negotiated and implemented in diverse social and political contexts, is something that the assessors employed by funding agencies often choose to ignore.

This edited volume thus reminds us that we need to be aware of the variety of complex agendas underlying such assessments; this book also opens our eyes to a variety of trends and developments in the field that we, as chroniclers of health policy and their future possibilities, need to remain sensitive to. Apart from listening to the widest possible range of voices and opinions, we need to be better informed about a plethora of local political and social cultures. This is important in a situation in which there is no universal policy that can be implemented globally, across national and social boundaries. The need for a global perspective is not downplayed by the contributors; however, what is recommended—and this is to be applauded—is that they provide a reminder that health policies require adaptation to a variety of regional, national and local contexts, each of which accommodate a range of human expectations and attitudes. Therefore, we are sensitised to the fact that as we set out to draw up plans, implement policy and prepare assessments of the efficacy and

long-term usefulness of health schemes, we need to adopt the broadest perspective in relation to the societies we are seeking to work with. In this regard, issues of class and gender are flagged up as being important; so are other significant social determinants such as varying educational levels, ethnic backgrounds and, not least, differentiated access to political power and information. Most importantly, this volume reminds us that it is important for all of us to consider—and celebrate—the human element, in all its rich diversity, while discussing issues of health.

The issues raised in this edited volume are particularly important in a context in which the World Health Organisation prepares to re-invigorate its commitment to the project of providing access to primary healthcare. I sincerely hope that World Health Organisation officials in Geneva, its regional offices and the field find the time to read these articles and think deeply about the issues they raise. The lessons these pieces provide are important, not least as they have been put together after constructive conversations among a group of people who appear to be socially engaged, politically informed and, perhaps most significantly, open-minded about what is considered useful and valuable by a diversity of communities and individuals.

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CORRECTION

V Inglis, K Ball, D Crawford. Socioeconomic variations in women's diets: what is the role of perceptions of the local food environment? *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2008;**62**:191–7.

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