

Introducing the Centre for the Study of Health Policy

The Centre for the Study of Health Policy was established in the Department of Community Health at the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School on 1 April 1987.

Aims of the centre

The broad objective of the Centre is to contribute to the development of a health service that meets the health needs of all South Africans. We recognise that such a service can only exist within a broadly democratic and non-racial society. Nonetheless we believe that there is work that can be done now that will facilitate the transformation of the existing service.

In order to meet this broad objective we have identified the following aims:

- * To promote a broad understanding of the nature of the existing health service, its strengths and weaknesses and the effect of current developments.
- * To popularise the idea that access to an adequate level of health care is a universal right, and to contribute to the development of a set of minimum standards of health care.
- * To promote discussion about appropriate structures for the delivery of health care in South Africa.
- * To contribute to attempts to promote progressive change within the health sector.
- * To help prepare the ground for the future transformation of the health service under a democratic, non-racial government.

How will we achieve our goals?

We see ourselves undertaking a variety of tasks:

Research, documentation and "modelling"

Scientific research and evaluation of data will lay the basis for the work of the Centre. Work to be undertaken includes:

- * Collating available information on health and health care in South Africa.
- * Doing research on the quality and quantity of health services available to different communities in South Africa.
- * Developing a set of acceptable minimum standards of health care that should be available to all South Africans and investigating the best system for delivering good care to all.

Dissemination of ideas

It is our intention to make our work as widely available as possible. We will do this in the following ways:

- * Publication of articles and papers in a wide variety of academic and popular journals.
- * Taking part in and, where appropriate, organising conferences and workshops on policy-related topics.
- * Discussing health policy issues with political, community and health worker organisations.
- * Teaching, at all levels, on subjects relevant to our work.

Resource and support work

We would like to assist other organisations, and people involved in health care, to develop policies, programmes and ideas which will make their work more effective.

The centre's first projects

We have identified three projects which we believe will lay the basis for detailed analysis of the present health services, and help us to develop ideas about their future transformation. There are:

A resource centre and data base

This will contain available information and analyses of the SA health sector, and other material relevant to our work.

A minimum standards project

In this project we will try to determine the minimum acceptable standards of care that should be available to all. This will lay the basis for both our critique of the present and our discussion of possible future structures for health care delivery.

A National Health System project

This project will look at options for the future, and focus on questions of how a health service can be structured, financed, staffed and managed to make the best use of scarce resources.

We hope our work will make some contribution to a better future for all South Africans. We would welcome any ideas, suggestions and criticism, as well as inquiries from people wanting to know more about the work of the Centre.

Eric Buch and Cedric de Beer (co-directors)