

About the Book...

Starting with the National Health Policy in 1983 private and voluntary organisations have received increasing mention in official documents. But specific policy towards the private health sector have been slow to emerge. Various factors have contributed to the recent interest in the structure and dynamics of private health sector in India. Firstly the private health sector has grown in many parts of the country, particularly in the areas experiencing economic development. The economic reforms with its emphasis on privatisation have contributed to policy interest in private health care sector. Public financing and private provision of health care is being talked about in this context. Private provision of health care services appears attractive when there are budgetary constraints for expansion of health services in the public sector. There is a hope that private provision of health care will help ameliorate the need for increased allocation of public funds for health care and at the same time keep up expansion of services to meet growing demand from people. On the other hand, growth of private forprofit health care institutions in an unregulated market has raised concerns about exploitation of consumers and quality of care. Concerns have also been raised about utilisation of tax concessions by the state and responsiveness of private corporate health care institutions to the needs of poor.

Naturally many questions arise. How big is the private health sector? Do private health care institution provide better quality care? Are they more efficient? Do they serve the poor? What's the role of the private health care provider elsewhere in the world? And many more. This book elucidates these issues, examines and analyses evidence from within and outside India and seeks to answer atleast some questions.

The Authors

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For some years, researchers and policy makers have called attention to the importance of private health care providers in India's health system. Private providers account for a large share of all health care delivered in the country and that share may be increasing over time. They reach urban and rural people and people across the income distribution. They account for the largest share of India's health expenditure. These broad facts suggest that the national and state level health policies should do more to address this significant private health sector. How can the negative effects of private health care be reduced and their positive effects enhanced? What should be the goal and direction of the government's actions in relations to the private sector? Today, in most states in India, these questions must be answered with little or no specific information about the numbers, types, locations, and activities of private providers. In general such information is almost entirely lacking or is quite unreliable.

This pathbreaking study by the Institute of Health Systems, Hyderabad takes a major step towards remedying this lack of essential evidence for health policy. IHS researchers have correctly defined the private health care sector broadly, to include both qualified and alternative private practitioners. Their study of a sample of these providers in a major state will provide a benchmark against which future efforts to fill this evidence gap will be measured. Such evidence still needs to be used wisely in creating new policy but it is clear that without this evidence, wise policy will be much less likely to be achieved.

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