Evaluating Health and Social Care

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**Ceri Phillips
Colin Palfrey
and
Paul Thomas**

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Preface

The origins of this book may be traced to the submission of a tender for a research contract to evaluate two major innovative programmes in the field of health and social care. Each of the authors had been interested in the notion of evaluation in the field of health and social care from the perspective of his respective discipline. There was thus a common factor – the field of health and social care – but also many conflicting and opposing views, grounded in the wide variety of approaches and frameworks available to potential evaluators.

We came to the conclusion that there is no one *best* approach to adopt; each has its merits and limitations. Our own preference is for a framework which combines a number of approaches in such a way that the methods chosen for evaluation are appropriate to the situation and context of the policy being examined. This approach, we argue, removes some of the biases of the discipline based approach and provides a rich and realistic picture in which both successes and failures can be identified. It is not, however, a panacea for problems of evaluation and it is certainly not *neutral* in any absolute sense. However, we believe that it is likely to be the most useful approach for evaluating policies and programmes in the field of health and social care.

Agencies within health and social care are under increasing pressure to evaluate and improve their performance, for example to measure effectiveness and efficiency and to assess the degree of satisfaction amongst the consumers of their services. The book aims to provide a practical guide for managers, professionals and students who wish to evaluate the performance of social care and health agencies.

Chapter 1 endeavours to answer the question ‘What is Evaluation?’, whilst at the same time demonstrating the

limitations of less comprehensive approaches to monitoring and evaluation and emphasising the need to involve the users of services at all stages of the evaluation process.

Chapter 2 deals with evaluation designs and methods, reviewing a range of designs that may be used in constructing an evaluation and considering the types of data that may need to be collected and how they can be collected. It also describes how the data can be checked for its validity and reliability and offers an introduction to the ways in which data can be analysed so as to generate appropriate findings for an evaluation.

Chapters 3–7 explore the main criteria available for evaluating health and social care: effectiveness, efficiency, organisational structures and processes, equality, equity, accessibility and how consumer opinions can be used in the evaluation process. Each chapter explains why these criteria are used, identifies the problems inherent in using them and offers specific guidance on how to use each of the criteria.

CERI PHILLIPS
COLIN PALFREY
PAUL THOMAS