

Introduction

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We are all involved in health and social care one way or another, be it as informal carers, users of health or social care services or as workers. It is not surprising, therefore, that this topic commands a substantial literature. As pointed out by Celia Davies and Martin Robb in their introduction to the first edition of this reader, there are already a number of books on the financing, organisation and administration of care services and this book does not duplicate them. Rather it juxtaposes the experiences and voices of service users with findings from research and current academic debates, making the links between theory and practice more amenable.

Since the first edition of this book was published in 1998 (Allot and Robb) there have been some substantial developments and changes in health and social care policies. The impact of some of these developments are reflected in the content of this new edition. By the end of its second term, the New Labour government, elected in 1997, had begun to implement a more choice-based approach to both health and social care. Money was to follow patients who would make choices about which hospital or other service provider they preferred; likewise disabled adults and older people were to be given their own budgets to spend on the support services they wished to purchase (Glennerster, 2006). Chapters in this book which reflect these developments include Stainton and Boyce on users and direct payments and Colin Barnes on independent living and the social model of disability. A further development has been devolution in the UK and divergence from the centre in terms of policy. This means that choice-based developments have varied. In Scotland, for example the uptake of direct payments in no way matches that in England. Another marked development since 1998, reflected in this book, is in the use of the internet. Several chapters address the topic directly and it is through the internet that service users are able to acquire knowledge and, therefore, the power to make informed choices. That said, it is likely that the more advantaged sections of society are those most able to make best use of the opportunities new technology offers. One enduring feature of health and social policy in early 2000s is the persistence of inequalities in health and in care provision. The concluding chapter of this book by Mary Shaw and Danny Dorling provides evidence of this.

Using the book

This book has been put together so as to attract a variety of readers. Students on undergraduate or pre-degree level courses should find the chapters of great relevance to their

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studies. Indeed the book is a set text for the Open University first level undergraduate course, K101: *An Introduction to Health and Social Care*. It should also, however, be of interest and use to those working in or providing health and social care services: the variety of paid workers, personal assistants, volunteers, service users and informal carers. The content of the book has been compiled with all these readers in mind.

The contents have been organised into four sections. Each starts with an introduction which takes the reader through some of the underlying themes in the section. These introductions will be of particular use to the reader who wants to work through the book from beginning to end or for those who want to focus on one particular aspect of care provision. The first chapter of each section contains an anthology of personal accounts or commentaries, often historical, of relevance to the section theme. The focus of the first section is on *people* who use and work in health and social care services. It contains accounts from individuals which as a whole provide a diverse range of perspectives on care provision including, for example, those of direct payment users, a black nurse, hospital porters and people experiencing poverty. The second section is organised around different care settings or *places* for care. It starts with an account of council estates but also includes hospitals, care homes, domestic settings and the internet. The third section focuses on *approaches* to care provision or, put another way, how care is provided. This section includes a number of chapters on issues of importance in the early 2000s such as the increasing use of unqualified health care assistants to provide hands-on nursing care, ways in which people use online electronic records and the impact of the internet on people's understanding of health and illness. The final section draws together chapters on some of the *ideas* that underpin health and social care provision in the 21st century and how they evolved. There is, for example, a chapter on the social construction of carers – a concept now central to health and social care – and other chapters which examine some of the political and philosophical ideas underpinning the provision of welfare.

Much of the content of this book has been put forward by members of the course team at the Open University and others involved in the production of K101: *An Introduction to Health and Social Care*. They include Dorothy Atkinson, Ken Blakemore, Joanna Bornat, Hilary Brown, Joyce Cavaye, Roger Gomm, Rebecca Jones, Andy Northedge, Sheila Peace, Jan Walmsley, Naomi Watson and Fran Wiles. As editors, we would like to thank them for their suggestions and their contribution to the editing. We would also like to thank Sarah Wright and Pat Jeal for their help and support in preparing the manuscript. Finally we wish to thank Margaret Allott and Martin Robb, the editors of the first edition of this book.

References

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