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Ethics, economics, and public financing of health care

Jeremiah Hurley

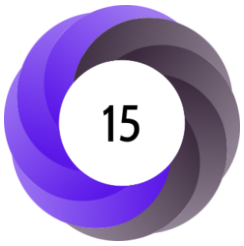
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Abstract

There is a wide variety of ethical arguments for public financing of health care that share a common structure built on a series of four logically related propositions regarding: (1) the ultimate purpose of a human life or human society; (2) the role of health and its distribution in society in advancing this ultimate purpose; (3) the role of access to or utilisation of health care in maintaining or improving the desired level and distribution of health among members of society, and (4) the role of public financing in ensuring the ethically justified access to and utilisation of health care by members of society. This paper argues that economics has much to contribute to the development of the ethical foundations for publicly financed health care. It focuses in particular on recent economic work to clarify the concepts of access and need and their role in analyses of the just distribution of health care resources, and on the importance of economic analysis of health care and health care insurance markets in demonstrating why public financing is necessary to achieve broad access to and utilisation of health care services.

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