

## Book Review

**J. Mental Health Policy Econ.** **1**:209 (1998). *Cost-Outcome Methods for Mental Health*. By William A. Hargreaves, Martha Shumaway, The-wei Hu, and Brian Cuffel. San Diego: Academic Press, 1998

There is an explosion of interest in adding cost-outcome methods to efficacy and effectiveness studies in mental health, addiction and alcoholism treatments. Such information is vital for making science-based decisions in mental health policy. This book applies economic evaluation to the special circumstances that exist in the delivery of mental health services and focuses specifically on cost-effectiveness and cost-utility methods. The authors embed cost-outcome studies in the larger context of designing research studies that are methodologically sound and policy relevant.

The book is addressed to readers who do not have an economics background, i.e., mental health services researchers. It is meant for graduate students or post-doctoral students, and essential clinical staff associated with treatment programs such as psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. Health economists involved in evaluation of delivery systems will find much assistance in the organization and presentation of the methods for their own applied work or teaching responsibilities. Discussion of design issues related to social function outcomes will also be helpful for public health officials and evaluators. The book is an outstanding source of current information on the status of mental health economic and policy research because of its extensive bibliography that is integrated with the discussion in the text. For researchers, one can assess the field and target study priorities.

The authors follow a didactically sound approach. They cover in sequence the big three issues: study design, economic costs and mental health outcomes. However, before the transition between

costs and outcomes, a very interesting chapter is inserted: 'Measuring service practice'. This is introduced because the standard intervention model is too loosely defined in most studies where treatment often appears as a 'black box'. The active ingredients are not truly known, and this surely confounds the research enterprise. Later, the cost-effectiveness ratio is introduced along with concerns for statistical adjustment. The final chapter introduces the issue of whether the study will guide policy and practice. Here, the authors briefly introduce meta-analysis, clinical decision analysis and modeling and cross-design experiments, which are techniques in use in medical treatments and may become increasingly applicable to mental health services research.

The book is not a treatise on foundations, theories or advanced concepts of cost-outcome methods. It is borne out of the practical considerations of the applied services research environment. Supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institutes of Health, the book is the collaborative work of scientists from various disciplines. It distills from their experience issues that must be addressed in designing a study. In such a brief survey, the specialist will find his area inadequately covered, but perhaps included in the ingredients for a successful research project. While many of these ingredients may seem obvious to the sophisticated researcher, the language and concepts of economics is often a stumbling block to collaborative work among the various disciplines involved in the research enterprise. If there is a black box of services research, this book will help to deconstruct the components.

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