

Book review

Who cares?: An overview of the Dutch systems of health care and welfare

*Hans van Ewijk and Tessa Kelder,
Edited by NIZW International Centre, Utrecht; Netherlands
Institute of Care and Welfare (NIZW), 1999,
pp. 79, ISBN 90 5050 746 8*

This is a short book: just over 40 pages of descriptive text, together with 13 pages of publications and eight pages of addresses. It is aimed at professionals in the care, welfare and health fields both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. At this length the authors cannot, of course, do any more than provide the introductory overview that they intend. I am not sure how useful the book will be to those familiar with aspects of the Dutch systems but to practitioners abroad hoping to obtain a quick account of the principal features and characteristics it should prove very useful.

As ever in publications such as this, one of the main difficulties is in classification. Here the authors have chosen what they describe and 'an approach midway between a functional and a targeted group-orientated classification' (p 9). The main categories are, thus, 'health care' on the one hand and 'care and welfare' on the other. There are four chapters on: General Information; Care and Welfare; Health Care and Public Health; and Topical Matters-Social issues, financing, structures, trends.

Inevitably in such a short book there are times when one would like more detail: for example about the 'independent boards [that] have been established for need assessment' (p 26); or about the nature of professional home care referred to on p. 28. Does this comprise a single profession or a range of professional groups? Who is responsible for the 'light' help and who for dressing or washing or for intensive care?

It is because such questions are bound to arise that the lists of relevant publications where one can look for more detail are important. These are, indeed, useful lists and give information, amongst other things, on the languages in which reports are available.

It would be easy to suggest additions to such a book and existing sections could be expanded to meet the particular interests of individual readers. Its virtue is, however, its brevity: it is only an introductory overview; and as such it works well. I do, however, think the authors could do one other thing in the next edition to add to the book's value. This would be to have lists also of academic publications on Dutch health care and welfare—both books and journal articles. This would add not only some detail to the brief descriptive accounts given here but also a range of critical analyses and commentaries.

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