



**Book Review: Mental Health and Social Policy: Beyond Managed Care, 5th ed.**

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## **Book Review: *Mental Health and Social Policy: Beyond Managed Care*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.**

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*Tjitske G. Tubbergen*

David Mechanic's fifth edition of *Mental Health and Social Policy* provides his continuing critical analysis of the state of mental health care and policy in the U.S. Mechanic defines the major issues and questions of the time, utilizing research to assist with clarifying them, and he explores the uncertainty around mental health policy. He continues to analyze the current changes within the mental health system as well the policies that drive the changes. Dr. Mechanic elaborates on future initiatives based on the 1999 Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health. The book outlines everything from mental health and mental health professions to diagnostic challenges for mental health and mental illness. Also he discusses how mental health services can be adequately financed and how managed care relates to other options for integrating innovations into current mental health services, including the entire range from inpatient to community mental health settings. Mechanic's mental health and mental illness history is useful to any student of social work, psychology, or nursing who is working in or collaborating with other mental health practitioners.

David Mechanic received his PhD from Stanford University in 1959. He is the founder and director of the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research, which was begun in 1985 at Rutgers University. Mechanic has written and edited more than 25 books and 400 articles in the area of health policy and health research, sociology, and the social and behavioral sciences. He has received a number of awards from distinguished professional and academic organizations.

Mechanic has an artful ability to incorporate historical issues and policies with current and future implications for mental health care, yet this book is likely to appeal to a limited audience.

Although it is a dry, detailed read offering a wealth of information, the book provides students and professionals a firm grasp on these topics as well as an understanding of where our mental health system began and how it has developed. The author reviews pertinent historical studies as he delves into the available research base of evidence-based mental health services. The text allows for a better understanding of mental health policies and what contributed to the creation of these policies. Mechanic expounds on how social policy overlaps with various political positions. He discusses the current utilization methods applied within managed care settings and highlights concerns within each, basically taking the view that managed care is here to stay and that it is reshaping how healthcare is provided now and will be provided in the future.

Chapters 1, 3, 5-6 give a highly detailed description and thorough overview of the definitions of mental health and mental illness, diagnostic guidelines, and treatment provided to mental health clients. Mechanic provides a basic overview of mental health and its professions that is likely to be a quite valuable for the majority of readers of this book. Unfortunately, Mechanic appears to spend excessive amounts of time covering clinical material that has, at best, a tangential relationship to the basic purpose of this book. For example, in Chapter 2 the author provides a detailed, general overview of mental health as well as diagnostic criteria that is basic and unnecessary.

Chapter 4 covers numerous theoretical perspectives on both micro and macro levels, and examines social problems associated with chronic mental illness and, most important for macro issues, how communities define mental illness. He incorporates much more than a medical model in his examination of the field of psychiatry, such as

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incorporating environmental issues and many other perspectives.

In Chapters 7 and 8, Mechanic reviews financial issues and the delivery systems of mental health services for consumers. He examines financial problems, focusing especially on budget cuts and lack of coverage for millions in this age of austerity. He addresses the current and future implications for managed care in the field of mental health. The author gives a thorough history lesson with regard to the implementation of mental health services from the mid-1950s. He focuses on the two waves of deinstitutionalization, examining a number of factors that set off the drive to deinstitutionalization and the fallout due to lack of adequate community care. Much of these two chapters is a history lesson. Many changes have occurred since 2008, when the book was published.

In Chapter 10, children's mental health issues and the use of psychotropic medications are addressed. Mechanic examines the appropriate and not so appropriate care that children have been given, stating its "evidence base is weak because of long neglect."

Finally, Mechanic examines ideological beliefs for caring for those within the community mental health system and laws for civil commitments, rights for treatment, and refusal of treatment. He reminds us that these laws are open to interpretation and that legal definitions are neither easy nor clear cut. Unfortunately portions of this book are out of date with the passing of the Healthcare Reform Bill on March 21, 2010. When the terms of this act are implemented, Mechanic will need another edition.

The author examines mental health in relation to racial and community guidelines, and the senseless criminalization of mental health. He also focuses on the increased attention given to childhood mental health and to the social-stress perspective, where he reports "an enormous growth of research" in recent decades. The author gives a thorough overview of mental health and social policy up to 2008. He delivers a read that will educate and enlighten those new to the area, but it is a review to those who have worked in the area of mental health over the last twenty years.

Overall Mechanic provides an extremely thorough book that examines mental health, community, and the laws and policies involved with mental health. Mechanic educates new mental health practitioners as well as seasoned practitioners focusing on evidence-based practice. He attempts to explain why policy within mental health and mental illness can be difficult. He challenges mental health workers to find new and more innovative ways to provide better managed care, ways to get the needed services to those without it, and how to best finance mental health care. This new edition looks at children's issues, and the changes that he believes are coming to the DSM and PTSD services for those engaged currently in the recent wars and the increase of soldiers returning home with PTSD. *Mental Health and Social Policy* is a must read for students within the mental health fields and for all beginning-level classes covering the historical and current aspects of mental health policy. And the every-day citizen would also benefit from reading this book.