

Making Choices in Health: WHO Guide to Cost Effectiveness Analysis

Edited by T Tan-Torres Edejer, R Baltussen, T Adam, R Hutubessy, A Acharya, DB Evans and CJL Murray. Pp. xiii + 318. Sw.fr.30/US\$27. WHO. 2003. ISBN 92-4-154601-8. (Available from SAMA-HMPG. Price R210, members R200.)

Clinicians, academics, funders, policy makers, consumers and ethnicists have all been sensitised to the need for evidence when making decisions in the adoption of health interventions. Evidence-based medicine relies on comprehensive analysis of scientifically valid studies covering sufficient subjects, with the proviso that both positive and negative results have been included in the analytical process. However, all this is not enough: to ultimately decide whether or not to adopt an intervention one is also obliged to consider the health economics of the situation. Whether introducing an intervention where none existed before, adding a second to complement an existing intervention, or seeking the right balance in terms of competing interventions, one needs to fully understand the dimensions of cost and effectiveness.

This *WHO Guide to Cost Effectiveness Analysis* is an eminently readable text that not only covers basic concepts for the novice who is simply seeking to understand the field, but also provides a set of background papers and applications. These include scientific papers by international experts in the fields of population modelling, communicating cost-effectiveness results to decision makers, and examples of specific health interventions. A mini-CD is also included with the book, and this will provide hands-on experience for those who wish to actually process cost data, calculate the effectiveness of interventions for a standardised population, or understand levels of uncertainty around costs and effects.

For the average reader, the first half of the book will be of great value in developing an understanding of how to rank interventions and decide on appropriate cost-effective mixes for a given set of conditions in a specific environment. Cost estimation is covered in detail, as is the full estimation of health effects. Yes, there may well be more comprehensive health economics reference sources that give much more in the way of definitions and alternative methods of determining impact of interventions, but this is certainly one that will not intimidate the uninitiated and will also appeal to the more advanced user.

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