

Chapter 15

Managing Public Healthcare Services in an International Economy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter differs somewhat in its approach to governance issues compared with the previous chapters as it goes beyond the national framework. In essence, the national and sub-national issues at stake do not quite capture the full picture when considering the future challenges of the provision of public healthcare services in the UK. This chapter looks at healthcare service exchanges across borders. Indeed, there has been a significant expansion of services trade, and in particular health services, which have grown not only thanks to a number of institutional frameworks but also to the support of the British government and health stakeholders. However, there are also a number of risks involved in the international exchange of health services, which can have a significant impact on public healthcare systems.

INTRODUCTION

The international exchange of health services is a rather new development in the UK, but it would seem that the furthering of trade and investment in this sector could have a significant impact on the National Health Service (NHS). The British government and regional authorities are increasingly being warned by civil society and academics alike to bear in mind the risks of the globalisation of health on the British population. Yet limited data exists on the impact of advancing health services across borders with most studies looking at the overall negative effects on public health from trade liberalisation more generally. Health products, notably pharmaceutical goods, are part and parcel of the internationalisation process. However, the impact of the internationalisation of healthcare services, and especially the effects on public health provision, while gaining much media attention, particularly with the negotiation of recent Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) to free up trade and investment, has remained largely allusive and has been given insufficient attention. The final chapter of this publication will thus examine the issues that have

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arisen from such processes, how they affect national governance and what might be the implications for public health service provision in Britain.

GLOBALISATION AND PUBLIC HEALTHCARE GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Global Governance

This publication has thus far defined governance in the national and local contexts. However, global governance can also have an impact on the delivery of public health services. Global governance tends to be defined negatively as an absence of hierarchy and a dysfunctional process. Only in the 1990s did the idea of global governance emerge. In 1995, in the first issue of the academic journal *Global Governance*, Lawrence Finkelstein raised the question “What is global governance?” (Finkelstein, 1995, p. 367). He went on to explain that the international system actually lacks central management and control and any clear hierarchy. Therefore, governance was used in the negative sense to refer to the absence of government. Rosenau (1995) describes the anarchic structures of world politics in regards to global governance. It is very difficult to manage, organise and govern the world system of trade and investment in areas such as health because, as Rosenau underlines:

There is no emergent order around which communities and nations are likely to converge. Global governance is the sum of myriad – literally millions of – control mechanisms driven by different histories, goals, structures, and processes (Rosenau, 1995, p. 16).

The vision of a lack of coherence and order in global governance has continued to be upheld by many researchers and described as a “patch-wise institutionalisation of functions of governing beyond the nation state” (Jonsson & Tallberg, 2010).

The need for governance beyond the nation state has been recognised by the vast majority of researchers, policy makers and the like. The reason that many authors give for the need to shore up global governance is the necessity to find solutions to highly complex problems (Altvater, 1999; Hardin, 1999; Peters, 2011). While there is consensus on the need for new governing processes to deal with global issues, there does not seem to be agreement on the nature of such processes. Since the lack of a regulatory framework in an international arena has been established, the next question would be what governance processes could be considered as legitimate or democratic? Legitimacy undoubtedly involves popular consent and clear representation, participation, deliberation, accountability and legality (Braithwaite, 1999; Weiss, 2000; Skogstad, 2005; Bevir, 2010; Considine & Afzal, 2011).

The Commission on global governance describes global governance as:

The sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken. (...) At a global level, governance has been viewed primarily as inter-governmental relationships, but it must now be understood as also involving non-governmental organisations (NGOs), citizens’ movements, multinational corporations, and the global capitalist market (Commission on Global Governance, 1995, p. 2).

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