

Preface

The German Health Care System, established in the late 19th century, is historically the first universal health care system. After World War II, in line with the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of 1948, other universal health care systems emerged all over Europe, some following the German example, some coming up with new ways to administer and finance health care for their people.

The development of individual health care systems in Europe created a wide variety of variations, e.g. concerning the way systems are financed, the organization of the public health care system, the extent to which different stakeholders are involved (e.g. the state, insurance providers, professionals etc.), the main contributors and other interesting distinctions. In trying to understand the complex health care systems that have evolved, a large number of aspects need to be taken into account. On a governmental level, one of the most important aspects is cost-effectiveness. Although the German health care system is among the systems providing a very high quality of health care, it is also one of the most expensive and keeps undergoing reforms to reduce costs and maintain or improve quality.

This book aims to provide an interested international audience with insight into the “German way” of providing universal health care with all its advantages and disadvantages. We hope it will contribute to facilitating a better understanding of the German health care system by providing information on a multitude of aspects for scientific and practical discussions and exchange.



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Foreword to the Third Edition

We are very pleased to announce the third edition of our book on the German Health Care system. Over the years we have found that a wide range of people from abroad but also from Germany not working in the health sector have found this short but comprehensive introduction useful to gain an understanding about key principles and structure before venturing into more detailed accounts.

The volume of services has steadily grown in the last years with current (2019) spending standing at around 410 billion €, which translates into more than 1.1 billion € per day. This economic aspects is balanced by a strong historical tradition which aims an equitable provision of services and a balanced contribution to financing. Local structures and agreements and consensus-seeking are defining characteristics of the system.

The German Health Care System manages multiple care processes aiming at the best health provision for every patient. This leads to huge amounts of data and at this point a health-care system depends on digital support. Digital tools may help in multiple ways, e. g. enabling health care professionals

to comply with evermore complex regulation ranging from documentation to adherence to medical guidelines.

Despite digital tools being everywhere in a modern life, they are scarcely available for patients who need to navigate the system or follow-up with their care provider. Only recently digital momentum has been developed in the German health care system. Extensive legislative reform aims to increase the quality as well as the convenience of care by digital means. This includes structural changes to the governance structure of the system by merging institutions or making the ministry the decision-maker instead of the self-administration bodies.

Furthermore, strong financial incentives have been created to integrate personal electronic health records and electronic prescriptions in the system and setting up a digital health infrastructure. In addition to this, Germany is the first country in the world where approved health apps can be prescribed and will then be reimbursed by social health insurance.

Several studies have ranked Germany at the lower end of digital competence and progress in terms of health care. Re-

cent reforms aim at changing this dramatically. Already, digital tools are essential for providing health care. The future of health care provision will be shaped by digital tools and the prudent use of big data. After years of political procrastination, Europe's largest single health care market is receiving an update towards a data driven health care system. We have completely revised chapter 3.2 to reflect these fundamental changes.

The Corona crisis has revealed the strengths and weaknesses of a local and yet encompassing system. As described in chapter 2.4 the German system could cope rather well due to its local, flexible structure, the high care capacities, and the willingness of the self-administration partners to react quickly in financing specific services.

In the last 4 years, a number of changes have taken place, the most important ones are described in this book. We hope to have again been able to come up with a balanced introduction to a complex health care system, which has shown its capabilities and resilience during a serious crisis. We invite reader to comment, criticise, and suggest changes.

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