Introduction

Health and health policy issues are those that arise when a gap exists between public expectations and actual organization performance, and when public disagreement exists concerning the best solution for closing that gap. With few exceptions, the issue concerns broad types of Health care Organizations (HCOs), or the health services industry as a whole. Issues may emerge slowly when only a limited number of stakeholders are affected by the performance (in other words, outcome), as with hepatitis C. They may emerge quickly when an outcome is highly visible, as with thalidomide [tha-LID-o-mide], or a critical number are affected, as with AIDS or patients' rights in managed care. An issue becomes politicized when the public, special interest groups, or other stakeholders generate sufficient interest of legislators or regulators to place the issue onto the political agenda. Health policy issue life cycle stages are anticipatory, emergence, enactment, and implementation. Health care, for example, has been an issue for seventy years. The face of the issue has changed as quality, access, and cost have competed for primacy. The issue, however, even with primacy accorded to cost, has not been resolved despite "resolutions" in the form of business coalitions, legislation, and community action. Rather than marking the end of an issue, each of these actions is better understood as a stage in a continuing life cycle.

Health and Health Policy

There are many ways to think about the health of human beings. The definition is important if it is to be addressed as part of policy. A useful contemporary definition is that health is the maximization of the biological and clinical indicators of organ function and the maximization of physical, mental, and role functioning in everyday life. This is positive definition. Contrast this with a negative definition seen in the response a medical resident gave his professor when asked to define health: "It is the condition before a work-up is done." The consequences of society defining health positively and broadly are substantial. In contrast to focusing on treatment of illness or injury to minimize an undesirable variable, such a definition encourages society to seek proactive interventions aimed at many variables in the quest for health. Health care is the total societal effort, undertaken in the private and public sectors, focused on pursuing health. Health administrators engaging in management issues to affect health policy issues are not just adapting to their environment, but also changing it. These senior executives have a responsibility to defend their HCO from inappropriate intrusion by stakeholders or government.

Impact of Health Policy
The structure and financing of health services is rational; the parties act according to their calculations of costs and benefits. Viewed in its entirety, however, health policy is uncoordinated and seemingly contradictory. Health policies are inequitable and inefficient; low income persons end up subsidizing those with higher incomes. These results, however, are the consequence of a rational system. These were the intended outcomes of the legislators. To measure the impact of health policy on the environment and people it is necessary to measure quality of care and to effectively disseminate it to various audiences. The challenge of the American health care system continues to be balancing its three competing goals: containing health costs, improving access to care, and enhancing the quality of care.