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The Decentralization of Health Services: From Theory to Practice

A Ugalde

N Homedes

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Objectives: There are two main objectives in this work: first, to discuss the lack of consensus on the concept of decentralization as well as the difficulty of measuring the level of decentralization in a health system and, second, to identify its supporters, their reasons and the results achieved after decentralization in Latin America.

Methodology: Literature review, analytical and descriptive

Results: Homedes and Ugalde analyze and evaluate experiences with decentralization and privatization of health systems in Latin America. The authors describe the role of ideology and some bi-national and supranational organizations that play and have played an important role in decentralization. This becomes especially relevant during the last 25 years, when there has been a wave of reforms in the States, where a main theme has been decentralization. They indicate that the primary aim of neoliberalism is to concentrate capital in a small global elite, which has promoted two fundamental principles: 1) the private sector is more efficient than the public sector, and 2) a big government corrupts. The authors reported a lack of consensus on the meaning of decentralization and a lack of methodologies that help to measure the degree of decentralization that a country has achieved. The authors describe four types of decentralization identified by various authors: deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization.

Homedes and Ugalde presented a series of data that demonstrate the impact of decentralization of the health sector in Latin America. They show comparative tables between the reasons and justifications for decentralization, the justifications and evidences of its impact.

Conclusions: For the authors, justifications are easily refutable evidence to show that different decentralization processes have taken place in Latin America and other regions. Decentralization has meant taking steps backward in several countries as it imposes on states and municipalities to implement a program created at the federal level.