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Argentina: no lesson learned

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Objectives: The article analyzes, with an emphasis on health policy, the political, ideological, social, and economic process by which the Argentinean economy was transformed, the structural consequences, the policies responsible for dismantling the welfare state, and the alternatives that have arisen since the crisis of late 2001.

Methodology: Qualitative analysis of interviews and documents, combined with quantitative analysis of secondary data for context.

Results: This article analyzes the causes of the mid-1970s crisis in Latin America and the responses promoted by international financial institutions. The situation in Argentina since the health care policy reform of the 1990s, which was promoted by the World Bank and accepted and implemented by the Argentinean government, is examined in greater depth. The authors analyze the profound ideological changes that enabled uncritical acceptance of health as a market commodity, and the government's withdrawal of its responsibility to guarantee the right to good health and provide tax-funded health care. The analysis then focuses on the social and economic results of ten years of structural adjustments in the Argentinean economy and health care reforms, and government responses to the health care sector after the late 2001 crisis. The authors conclude by analyzing some social movements that propose alternatives to government policies, since such policies merely increase business opportunities for multinational corporations while they further shrink the state's role as a health care provider.

Conclusions: Argentina provides a classic example of the changes by which a country is inserted into the "globalized" economy imposed by the Washington Consensus. These processes have intensified with pressure from the World Trade Organization and various free trade agreements. The emergence of movements critical of the model and proposing alternatives has served to revitalize the debate and offer concrete paths to a transformation of the exclusionary model imposed by neoliberal policies.