The Politics of Health in Mexico. The Neoliberal Restructuring

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Objectives: To identify and analyze the contents and modalities of the transformation of health policy in Mexico during the governmental period of 1982-2006.

Methods: Researchers performed a reconstruction of the major changes and reforms in the Mexican health sector. They analyzed a variety of processes including the financial restructuring of this sector, administrative decentralization, privatization of health services, health governmental discourse, and its strategies for extending coverage.

Results: In the period studied several changes were expressed, such as reductions in public spending on health and financial changes in this sector; administrative decentralization without resources, which became an operational de-concentration merely functional; the strengthening of technocratic discourse; the selectivity of care interventions and targeted services to populations. These processes are summarized and linked to the formation of a basic package of health services (cost effective) to care for the poor. The authors highlight the market logic as the core that drives all these transformations, whose effects are observed during four six-year administrations, thus encouraging selective privatization of profitable public services.

Conclusions: This is a six-year health policy reform that uses the market as the general organizer of the system. Its effects include the weakening of public health institutions, the accelerated development of health markets, the positioning of health/disease as a private problem and health care as a commodity.