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Abstract

A review of:

Health and Human Rights: Basic International Documents, 2d Edition, edited by Stephen P. Marks. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Published by Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2006. 392pp.

Keywords

Human rights, Health, Access to health care

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In Health and Human Rights: Basic International Documents, Stephen P. Marks has put together a collection of international legal documents and policy statements pertinent to health and human rights. Although the volume contains many legal documents readily available elsewhere (including treaty collections widely accessible on the Internet), the volume very effectively and thoroughly pulls together a wide-ranging set of texts in one coherent, easily-accessible source. Thus, this collection of primary legal materials on health and human rights should be a valuable resource for health professionals, scholars, and human rights advocates working in the fields of health and human rights.

The legal documents and policy statements included in the volume are arranged in eight categories. Part I includes basic legal documents and policy statements on human rights in general. The inclusion of general human rights texts is new to this second edition of the volume, and according to the editor, has been added for the benefit of health practitioners who may not have a specialist's knowledge of human rights. Part II includes basic texts on bioethics as applied to issues of health and human rights, including professional ethics, research and experimentation, and biotechnology. Part III of the volume contains United Nations, regional, and other international documents dealing with the right to health. Part IV includes texts pertaining to the protection of life and physical integrity. The treaties, declarations, and policy statements in this section include documents covering the right to life, torture, disappearances and extra-judicial execution, armed conflict, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Part V contains basic texts pertaining to the health dimensions of the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, housing, and education. Part VI of the volume includes legal documents pertaining to the health and human rights of vulnerable populations, including women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and refugees and displaced persons. The legal documents and policy statements in Part VII involve the human rights aspects of health policy. The issue areas covered by the texts in this section include infectious diseases, business, trade, intellectual property, occupational health and safety, and tobacco control. Part VIII includes legal documents and policy statements pertaining to the health aspects of environmental protection.

The main contribution of this volume is that it pulls together such a wide array of unembellished primary legal resources pertinent to health and human rights in a single volume. The editor does not analyze the health dimensions of the legal documents nor policy statements. Similarly, the editor does not provide a political or social context for interpreting these texts. For these reasons, the volume is less likely to be useful in an undergraduate classroom setting. Instead, the volume is most likely to benefit scholars, health professionals, and other practitioners working at the intersection of health and human rights issues by providing them with ready access to pertinent legal documents in a single well-organized source.

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