Reviewer's report

Title: Is US Healthcare an Appropriate System? A strategic perspective from systems science.

Version: 2 Date: 16 November 2008

Reviewer number: 2

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

All addressed though the author may wish to strengthen his arguments with regard to my previous 2nd point, which was:

'Why it is appropriate to use this model (or metaphor) based on a biological system to diagnose another, social, system, as is done in this paper. ..... In particular the author might wish to address the objection that social systems such as healthcare systems are fundamentally different from biological systems because humans have intention and knowledge. Such a difference might be thought to preclude comparison.'

The author has addressed this, but he might wish to consider the following.

2a. The more difficult issue is that of intention. As understood in philosophical discussion of human action, to have an intention is to be in a state of mind that is favourably directed towards bringing about (or maintaining, or avoiding) some state of affairs. In this interpretation it is a state of mind that is the source of an intention - a mental rather than a physical state. But, under this interpretation, it is not possible to argue that ‘the capacity for intent also seems to be present on a basic level in all biologic systems differentiated only by the source of the intent (e.g. metabolic, hormonal, emotional etc).....’ without also accepting the position that all mental states are intelligibly reducible to physical states. Is this what the author has in mind, or is he working from some other interpretation of intention?

2b. The author argues that the capacity of humanity to use knowledge is limited –‘this function comes into play only in a small percentage of people on a daily basis’. While this is true and explains widespread failure to make appropriate behavioural and lifestyle choices, it also suggests that appropriate knowledge is available, even if only used by a few. But is this the case? There is a stronger argument based on the limitations of human knowledge per se, i.e. that we must all act all the time in conditions of uncertainty in which there can never be a complete understanding of all the processes, factors and relationships involved, and therefore of all the possible consequences. Knowing when and how to act becomes a matter of judgement and, as such, is fallible.

Minor essential revisions

These have been addressed
Discretionary revisions
These have been addressed
The author may wish to note that reference 8 is repeated at reference 17

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.