

The role of health economists in public policy

Wim Groot
Maastricht University



Disclosure

- Act as policy advisor
- Regularly comment on policy in media



Why pay attention to the role of health economists in public debate?

- Public interest in health care is enormous
- Economic interests in health care are large
- Health care is highly regulated industry, with large political involvement
- Health economists are asked to advice and comment on this as outside experts



Health economics influences policies

The economic discussion shapes how policy makers understand a given issue:

- Rising costs of health care
- Costs per Qaly
- Value based health care



Why be involved in public debate?

- The ‘engaged public intellectual’
- If economic science contributes to social welfare, economists have an obligation to disseminate their knowledge for policy as well



Incentives to be involved in policy and public debate

- It does not add to academic salary
- Status, gratification
- It is valued by universities and research funding organizations
- Closer connection to the domain of our research



How neutral is (health) economics?

- Individualistic approach: everyone counts equally
- Emphasis on
 - The role of incentives
 - Market failure as a motive for intervention
- Framing of results matters



Science and policy may conflict with each other

- Policy is about achieving goals, not to find the truth
- Science is important but not decisive for policy
- Academic discussion may be misused for political gain
- Science should not be used to provide false security for policy



There are risks in being involved in public debate

- The 'do's and don't's' of (social) media use
- Health economics as a common good
- Stay within your expertise
- Be aware that you might be pressured or used



