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978-0-521-34696-2 - Professional Judgment: A Reader in Clinical Decision Making

Jack Dowie and Arthur Elstein

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TO HILARY AND ROCHELLE

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CONTRIBUTOR AFFILIATIONS

Henry J. Aaron The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. 20036, USA

Hal R. Arkes Department of Psychology, Ohio University, Athens, OH 45701, USA

Ruth Beyth-Marom Everyman's University, Ramat Aviv 61392, ISRAEL

John E. Billi Department of Internal Medicine, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA

Georges Bordage Bureau de Pédagogie Médicale, Faculté de Médecine, University Laval, Quebec, P.Q., G1K 7P4, Canada

Charles L. Bosk Department of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA

Norman F. Boyd Ontario Cancer Institute, Toronto, Ont., M4X 1K9, Canada

Michael H. Boyle Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont., L8N 3Z5, Canada

James B. Bushyhead University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195, USA

Daniel Candee Department of Research in Health Education, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT 06032, USA

Caryn Christensen Center for Educational Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL 60612, USA

Jay J.J. Christensen-Szalanski Department of Management Sciences, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242, USA

A. Ciampi Montreal Children's Hospital Research Institute, 2300 Tupper Street, Montreal, P.Q., H3H 1P3, Canada

Charles H. Clanton Stanford University, Stanford, California, USA

Robyn M. Dawes Department of Social and Decision Sciences, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA

Contributor affiliations

xi

- F. Tim de Dombal Clinical Information Science Group, St James Hospital, Leeds, UK
- Peter Doubilet Department of Radiology, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston MA 02115, USA
- Michael F. Drummond Health Services Management Centre, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK
- David M. Eddy Center for Health Policy, Research and Education, Duke University, Durham, NC 27706, USA
- Hillel J. Einhorn University of Chicago (deceased)
- Arthur S. Elstein Center for Educational Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL 60612, USA
- Stephen A. Eraker Department of Medicine, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA
- Baruch Fischhoff Department of Social and Decision Sciences, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA
- John Fox Biomedical Computing Unit, Imperial Cancer Research Fund, London, WC2A 3PX, UK
- G. Anthony Gorry Department of Community Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX 77030, USA
- Larry D. Gruppen Department of Postgraduate Medicine and Health Professions Education, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA
- Robert M. Hamm Institute of Cognitive Science, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309, USA
- Allan R. Harkness Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA
- Vincent L. Hoellerich Department of Anesthesiology, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA 02114, USA
- Margaret Holmes Department of Medicine, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA
- Gerald B. Holzman Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA 30902, USA
- Ruth B. Hoppe Department of Medicine, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA
- Sargent P. Horwood Department of Pediatrics, McMaster University Medical Center, Hamilton, Ont., L8N 3Z5, Canada
- Jerome P. Kassirer Department of Medicine, Tufts University School of Medicine/New England Medical Center, Boston, MA 02111, USA

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Contributor affiliations

Jay Katz Yale University School of Law, New Haven, CT 06520, USA

Karen Klein Urban Woman and Child Health Clinic, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, USA

Benjamin J. Kuipers University of Texas, San Antonio, Texas, USA

Hilary Llewellyn-Thomas Ontario Cancer Institute, Toronto, Ont., M4X 1K9, Canada

Dennis J. Mazur Veterans Administration Medical Center, Portland, OR 97207, USA

Ali McGuire Health Economics Research Unit, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, AB9 22D, UK

Barbara J. McNeil Department of Radiology, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139; and Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, MA 02115, USA

William A. Metheny Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA 30912, USA

Kashinath D. Patil Department of Family Practice, University of Nebraska College of Medicine, Omaha, NE 68105, USA

Stephen G. Pauker Division of Clinical Decision Making, Tufts University School of Medicine/New England Medical Center, Boston, MA 02111, USA

Peter Politser Department of Health Policy and Management, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, MA 02115, USA

Bill Puka Department of Philosophy, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY 12180, USA

Michael M. Ravitch Office of Medical Education, Northwestern University School of Medicine, Chicago, IL 60611, USA

Marilyn L. Rothert College of Nursing, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA

David R. Rovner Department of Medicine, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA

Paul D. Saville Charleston, West Virginia 25304, USA

Donald A. Schön Department of Urban Studies and Education, M.I.T., Cambridge, MA 02139, USA

William B. Schwartz Tufts University School of Medicine, Boston, MA 02111, USA

John C. Sinclair Department of Pediatrics, McMaster University Medical Centre, Hamilton, Ont., L8N 3Z5, Canada

Heather J. Sutherland Ontario Cancer Institute, Toronto, Ont., M4X 1K9, Canada

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Contributor affiliations

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Robert Tibshirani Department of Preventive Medicine and Biostatistics,
Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont., M5S 1A1,
Canada

James E. Till Ontario Cancer Institute, Toronto, Ont., M4X 1K9,
Canada

George W. Torrance Faculty of Business, McMaster University, Hamil-
ton, Ont., L8S 4M4, Canada

Robert S. Wigton Department of Internal Medicine, University of
Nebraska College of Medicine, Omaha, NE 68105, USA

Fredric M. Wolf Department of Postgraduate Medicine and Health
Professions Education, University of Michigan Medical School,
Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA

Robert L. Wortmann Department of Medicine, The Medical College of
Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI 53225, USA

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EDITORS' PREFACE

Our aim in assembling this collection has been to provide an interdisciplinary introduction to judgment and decision making in the clinical professions. By 'clinical professions' we mean those in which (1) professionals, either by themselves or as part of a team, have responsibility for the management of individual cases (commonly called patients or clients, depending upon the profession); (2) that responsibility is based significantly, although not exclusively, on the expressed or implied consent of the individual concerned; and (3) elements of risk and uncertainty are unavoidable, due to the nature of the problems to be dealt with and/or the imperfect character of the knowledge and information available to deal with them. (While aware of views that challenge the conventional interpretation of the professional–client relationship, in the extreme portraying it as yet another device whose latent function is to maintain bourgeois hegemony, we feel that most of the issues addressed in our collection remain of practical import, whatever structural perspective is adopted.)

A clear implication of our main title is that we believe the issues and approaches discussed in this collection have general relevance to all clinical professions. However, to avoid providing only a shallow and inadequate level of empirical detail, we have concentrated exclusively on clinical medicine. We feel, moreover, that it is important to provide anyone seeking insight into judgment and decision-making processes in the real world – or real worlds, as some writers would argue – with some substantial contact with the economic and other contexts in which these activities occur. The collection therefore offers multiple interdisciplinary perspectives on a single area of application. In this way, it contrasts with, but also complements, two companion readers: *Judgment and Decision Making: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, edited by Hal Arkes and Kenneth Hammond (Cambridge University Press, 1987) has a largely psychological and social psychological focus, but surveys a number of application settings; *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, edited by Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky (Cambridge Univer-

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Editors' preface

sity Press, 1982) concentrates on basic psychological decision processes and is the least applied of the three volumes. We have chosen to present a broader range of perspectives on judgment and decision making, and to limit the survey largely to the clinical domain as the arena within which these activities are carried out.

Our guiding philosophy has been to indicate the variety of approaches and treatments now being adopted towards professional judgment and decision making within the domain marked out. The reader will accordingly find a mixture of papers, some more discursive, some more analytical, some reviewing an area of empirical research, some exemplifying the research in detail. A vast number of papers could have been included, equal in quality to those selected, and we are all too aware of the extremely subjective nature of the judgment and decision processes which have produced this set of thirty papers and not another. Very mindful of the critique of human judgment and decision making expressed in several of the papers in our collection, we plead the necessity of arriving at a *satisfactory*, rather than an *optimal*, solution to the problem of choice with too many alternatives.

We are keenly aware that for the general reader, these papers cannot stand alone. Yet our ability to supply the desirable explanatory and background material has been severely constrained by the size of the volume. The papers presented are thus highly selective and introductory; essentially they are ones which, we think, constitute useful points of entry, in one way or another, to the various literatures and sub-literatures of a growing field. Given the diverse nature of the collection, we felt that it would be most useful to readers if we provided one lengthy introductory overview of the papers, giving a sense of the territory traversed in the volume and of some of the underlying issues, rather than discussing each paper as it appears.

Wherever possible, papers have been reproduced in their entirety.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of our respective institutions, the Open University and the University of Illinois at Chicago, during the time we have been engaged in this intercontinental as well as interdisciplinary effort. The efforts of the junior editor were supported in part by grants from the Josiah Macy, Jr, Foundation (B-8520004) and the National Library of Medicine, LM-04583; Laurie J. Belzer and James M. Dod assisted in the early phases of bibliographic search and appraisal. We are very grateful to Chris Nichols for her unstinting help and support in the preparation of this volume.