

SCARR Conference 2009

Institutional adaptation in risk regulation in the health sector in England and Japan:
Proactive response or staged retreat?

This paper compares the two contrasting health delivery systems of England (nationally run) and Japan (predominantly privately run), and contrasts different patterns of institutional adaptation in risk-based safety regulation in the hospital sector. By looking at similar initial reactions from both governments after the major malpractice incidents in the late 1990s, the paper argues that institutional arrangements can be disrupted under pressure from the general public, opening up a pathway for a new type of risk regulation, with a greater emphasis on patient rights. However, as public saliency in the printed media decreased, the different trajectories of England and Japan became visible. Accordingly, institutional configurations began to play an important role in deciding policy choices, as did interaction between government and the public perceptions as presented by the media. As a result, 'staged retreat' can be observed in the system where political accountability was not firmly established, while 'selective adaptation' became more frequent in the system where elected officials still play a role in agenda setting. The article sheds light on the dynamic conservatism of the health systems, by drawing on both theoretical argument and empirical data (newspaper archive and semi-structured interviews). (191 words)

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