GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

SYLLABUS

COURSE TITLE: MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY
COURSE NUMBER: HLAD 340
INSTRUCTOR: RALPH BELL, Ph.D.
CREDIT HOURS: 3.0
TRIMESTER: FALL 1983, FALL 1984

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course is intended to provide the student with a relatively broad overview of the field of Medical Sociology. The student will become familiar with the basic theories and concepts of the field for topics such as: access to medical care, utilization of health services, the patient-practitioner relationship, health care of older people, health care professions, and the role of hospitals in the health care system. Finally, the course will address the role of Medical Sociology in health care policy formulation and its role for the future directions of health care in the United States.

COMPETENCY STATEMENTS:
Upon completion of the course the student should be able to:

1) understand the sociological perspective for viewing health care.

2) evaluate the functioning of the components of the health care system.

3) apply sociological concepts and theories to current topics and trends in health care.

4) understand problems in access to medical care and the sociological theories relevant to the utilization of health care.

5) understand illness and illness behavior as sociological concepts.
6) understand the often complex relationship between patients and health care providers in terms of social relationships.

7) view possible future directions and modifications in our current health care system.

RATIONALE:

Although the field of Medical Sociology is relatively young, its development as a discipline has been occurring over a long historical time span. Currently, the complexity of health care processes are examined by a somewhat disparate set of subtopics in the field. In order to better understand the nature and process of health care, a broad base of knowledge is necessary for those who plan to continue with more advanced studies in Medical Sociology. This course is designed to provide the student with such a broad base of knowledge.

TOPICS OF INSTRUCTION:

1. The Development of Medical Sociology
2. The Social Definition of Illness
3. Access to and Utilization of Health Services
4. The Patient-Practitioner Relationship
5. The Health Professions
6. The Hospital in the Health Care System
7. Issues in Health Care and the Future of the Health Care System

APPROACH TO THE COURSE:

This course will follow a lecture/discussion format. Each class meeting will consist of a lecture on the assigned topic which will be followed by a class discussion focusing on a general question relevant to the assigned reading material as well as to the current state of health care. Students are encouraged to ask questions freely and are required to participate in the discussions. Should students express interest in discussion topics other than those suggested by the instructor, we can easily shift the focus of the discussion.

Students should read the assigned material in the text prior to the class meetings to help insure that everyone shares at least a minimum of common knowledge.

There will be a mid-term and a final examination composed of objective type questions. Make-up examinations will be given
only when the student makes prior arrangements with the instructor or if the student provides a valid, verifiable reason for missing an exam.

REQUIREMENTS:
The mid-term examination will count for 40% of the final grade; the final will count for 50% of the grade; class participation will comprise the final 10% of the student's grade.

REQUIRED TEXT:

TOPIC 1: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY

RATIONALE:
Although Medical Sociology as a discipline is relatively young, its development is an outcome of centuries of advancement in medicine and sociology. In order to better understand why medical sociology exists in its current state, it is important to trace its development within a historical context. It is also necessary to understand the basic concepts and subtopics in the field.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:
The following topics will be discussed:

1. General concepts in sociology.
2. The origins and development of Medical Sociology as a discipline.
3. The subtopics of Medical Sociology.
4. Components of the health care system.

TEXTS:
Wolinsky, Chapters 1 and 2.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
Chapter 2: How can Medical Sociology as a discipline and body of research be useful in determining health care policy in the U.S.?
TOPIC 2: THE SOCIAL DEFINITION OF ILLNESS

RATIONALE:

In order to understand health care and illness behavior, it is essential that we arrive at a suitable definition of illness. Illness, however, can be defined differently depending on the theoretical orientation of the definer. A social definition of illness is essential to the underlying concepts of Medical Sociology. There are other definitions of illness, however. We will focus on the major conceptual models of illness and attempt to discuss their inadequacies and failings. In doing so, we will attempt also to arrive at a more generic definition.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The following topics will be discussed:

1. The basic models for defining health and illness.
2. The measurement of illness.
3. The positive and negative effects of psychological stress.
4. Parson's Sick Role Concept.
5. Illness as deviant behavior.
6. The medicalization of deviance.

TEXTS:

Wolinsky, Chapters 3 and 4.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 3: How can we define illness so that it is a more generic concept?

Chapter 4: The medicalization of deviance has brought the legal concept of criminal culpability to the forefront of public debate. How does the concept of medicalization of deviance affect the debate and what are the possible ramifications for society?

TOPIC 3: ACCESS TO AND UTILIZATION OF HEALTH SERVICES

RATIONALE:

Sociologists have developed several models which explain the use of health services. Whether or not a person uses health services
depends on whether the person has access to health services. Access in turn is dependent on a number of social and demographic variables. We will examine the concept of access to health services and its relationship to the utilization of services.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The following topics will be discussed:

1. The concept of access to medical care.
2. The concept of "equitable" access.
3. The measurement of Access.
4. Explanatory models of access to health care.
5. The measurement of utilization

TEXTS:

Wolinsky, Chapter 5.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 5: How can access to health care be made "equitable" while insuring that health services are not "over utilized" by some members of society?

TOPIC 4: THE PATIENT-PRACTITIONER RELATIONSHIP

RATIONALE:

The social relationship between practitioner and patient is often complex and may in fact be dynamically changing. As always, sociologists from different theoretical orientations view the relationship from different perspectives. The patient-practitioner relationship varies depending on the characteristics of both the provider and the patient. The elderly and mentally ill may have different relationships with their providers than younger patients.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The following topics will be discussed:

1. Basic models of the patient-practitioner relationship.
2. The roles occupied by the patient and the health care provider.
3. The life-cycle and the social aspects of aging.
4. Models of mental illness.
TEXTS:
Wolinsky, Chapters 6 and 7.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 6: How will the increasing expectation of physician accountability affect the patient-practitioner relationship?

Chapter 7: The U.S. population is aging. How is the increase in the number and percentage of older Americans likely to affect the functioning of the health care system?

TOPIC 5: THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS

RATIONALE:

There are many different types of health care providers within the formal and informal health care system. A number of legal, professional, and social constraints are placed on health care professionals which affect their education, training, and practice. Physicians are most often thought of when the topic of health professional arises. There are a host of ancillary health care professionals working in the field as well. Some "new" health professionals are trained to relieve some of the burden of large physician patient loads while others simply assist in the physician's practice. All health professions have come under close public scrutiny recently and the rise in malpractice complaints underlies this public concern.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The following topics will be discussed:

1. The physician as professional.
2. The recruitment and socialization of physicians.
3. The education and training of physicians.
4. Trends in physician supply.
5. The role of nurses in the health care system.
6. The "new" health professionals.

TEXTS:

Wolinsky, Chapters 8 and 9.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 3: Medical technology is increasing at a rapid rate, yet the length of time physicians spend in training has remained constant. What changes are in store for future medical education? How will these changes affect the physician as we know him/her?

Chapter 9: What is the future for Nurse Practitioners and Physician's Assistants in the U.S.?

TOPIC 6: THE HOSPITAL IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

RATIONALE:

The hospital as we know it has developed over time from being a refuge for indigents to a modern, technologically, advanced center for comprehensive medical care. The social organization of the modern hospital has implications for both patients and providers. New modes of health care organizations, such as HMOs and free-standing emergency rooms, are now competing with the hospital, however. We will discuss how competition might affect the hospital and what they might do in a new competitive market.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The following topics will be discussed:

1. The historical development of the hospital.
2. The role of the modern hospital in the health care system.
3. The rise of alternative health care delivery systems and the movement toward ambulatory care.
4. Hospitals in the new competitive market

TEXTS:

Wolinsky, Chapter 10.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 10: What are the possible effects of alternative delivery organizations on the hospital's role in the health care system? How might hospitals adapt to the new competition for patients?
TOPIC 7: ISSUES IN HEALTH CARE AND THE FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE

RATIONALE:

The growth and expansion of the health care system in the U.S. has been accompanied by increasing technology and increasing costs. The spiraling costs associated with technological advancement and expansion has far-reaching social ramifications. Not only does the health care system have monetary and social costs for individuals, but there are also costs to society as a whole. In part, society's ability to cope with change and spiraling costs will determine the future directions of the American health care system.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

The following topics will be discussed:

1. The roles of medicine and society in health care.
2. The role of technology for changes in health care.
3. The medicalization of life.
4. The future of health care.
5. Can we afford to pay for health care now and in the future?
6. Alternatives for the future.

TEXTS:

Wolinsky, Chapters 11 and 12.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Chapter 11: Medical costs continue to rise at an alarming rate. How can we as individuals and as a society cope with spiraling costs or, if possible, contain them?

Chapter 12: Is a national health insurance program feasible in the U.S.? What are its chances of ever being instituted?