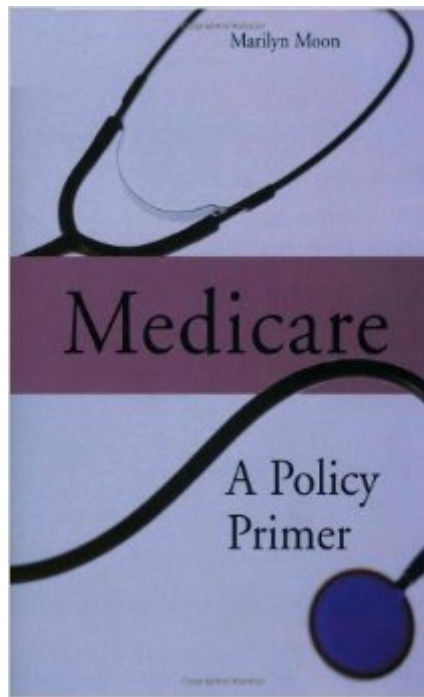


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Medicare: A Policy Primer



Synopsis

For some, Medicare is a model of what national health insurance could be in the United States. Despite its low administrative costs and significant contributions to the well-being of America's oldest and most disabled citizens, some critics assail the program as being out of sync with the needs of many senior citizens, while others often refer to it as "unsustainable" because of its high costs. Physicians and hospital administrators endlessly criticize and debate Medicare, but rely upon it for a substantial share of their revenues. In *Medicare: A Policy Primer*, Marilyn Moon explains what Medicare is, how it works, and where it is headed. She examines the problems facing the program and which reform options hold the most promise. She also examines the history of Medicare and how the program works in the broader context of health care, the federal government, and the economy. It is a clear introduction to one of the most critical debates in health policy and an important volume for anyone interested in the future of Medicare.

Book Information

Paperback: 230 pages

Publisher: Urban Institute Press; 1 edition (May 22, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0877667535

ISBN-13: 978-0877667537

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6 x 8.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,137,407 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in Â Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Administration & Policy > Medicaid & Medicare #97 in Â Books > Medical Books > Administration & Medicine Economics > Medicaid & Medicare #337 in Â Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Administration & Policy > Health Policy

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Medicare is a study in contrasts. In its financing, the program is modeled as what health wonks call "social insurance," which in reality is a euphemism for a politically effective but fiscally troubling mix of social welfare, health insurance, and cross-generational income transfers. Limited in coverage, slow to add coverage of new technologies, and often high in cost sharing, Medicare often cost-shifts to state Medicaid programs. While relatively cheap for the government to administer, Medicare is astonishingly complex, placing providers, suppliers, health plans, and patients under a mountain of

red tape. In Medicare: A Policy Primer, Dr. Marilyn Moon - a respected researcher, former Medicare Trustee, and one of the nation's leading Medicare policy gurus - "explains what Medicare is, how it works, and where it is headed." In this excellent introduction, Dr. Moon outlines the history of Medicare, taking readers from the program's origins in 1965 and the Great Society to today. The Medicare primer also walks readers through how the massive \$370 billion program works in relation to the rest of the U.S. health care system and other federal programs. While Dr. Moon is an unrepentant fan of Medicare and takes a decidedly Liberal, pro-entitlement approach to health policy, she takes pains to provide a thoughtful, balanced discussion of Medicare's key strengths and failings. She also debunks some lingering myths and assesses several of the more popular Medicare reform options. Kip Piper[...]

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