Evaluation of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Programs. 5th ed.


Evaluation of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Programs, by Richard A. Windsor, is the latest edition of a leading textbook on healthcare program evaluation. This book is intended primarily for graduate students in public health (eg, second-year master’s and doctoral students), though it may also be useful for program evaluation field staff who are planning training workshops or desire a reference on program evaluation methodology. The text distinguishes itself from the average primer on program evaluation in 2 ways. First, it adopts an explicit focus on the evaluation of health promotion and disease prevention (HP-DP) programs—thereby making it particularly useful to readers with an interest in changing behavior rather than treating disease. Second, it uses a unique format based on case studies, largely from the author’s extensive personal experience as an HP-DP program evaluator. For readers who learn best from seeing the application of methods to specific examples, the book will be a welcome addition.

This book differs in style from the average textbook. Rather than being a highly referenced and carefully worded text, it is written in a conversational tone, making it eminently readable but thereby sacrificing some precision. It will likely be welcomed by students and program staff who want a comprehensible overview of the field, but it may prove frustrating to more advanced academic readers looking for contemporary and precisely worded methodological detail.

The book is structured as an introduction followed by 5 additional chapters on planning, efficacy and effectiveness evaluation, measurement and analysis, process and qualitative evaluation, and basic cost analysis/economic evaluation. Each of the final 4 chapters has a series of 3–10 case studies to illustrate the application of methods to published HP-DP program evaluations. The book is a broad overview text, and its authority rests on the author’s vast experience and the wealth of rich case studies presented, not on careful and complete methodological characterization in any single chapter. The conversational style, use of abbreviations, level of detail appropriate to an overview text, and focus on application of methods to specific cases are all consistent within the chapters.

The author’s greater level of familiarity in some areas (eg, evaluation planning and measurement) than others (eg, qualitative methods and economic evaluation) is apparent but not distracting. In using examples from his personal experience, he enables readers to follow the evaluation of specific HP-DP programs—smoking cessation programs in particular—from planning to completion, and from early instrument development to definitive evaluation of effectiveness. The trade-offs inherent in providing such depth in specific case studies include a loss of breadth in the types of programs described (eg, a relative paucity of examples from outside the United States) and methods employed (eg, the types of data collection instruments described). That said, there is no substitute for learning from experience, and this text gives readers a unique opportunity to learn, almost as if being taught directly by an insightful HP-DP program evaluator with a wealth of real-world experience.

In summary, this book combines a very broad and conversational overview of methods for HP-DP program evaluation with rich “deep dives” that illustrate the application of those methods to specific case studies. Advanced academic readers who desire an authoritative methodological text will find their needs met elsewhere, but for students and program staff who thrive on case-based learning and need a tractable overview of how to perform a program evaluation from start to finish, this text will be invaluable.

Note

Potential conflict of interest. Author certifies no potential conflicts of interest.

The author has submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest. Conflicts that the editors consider relevant to the content of the manuscript have been disclosed.

David W. Dowdy
Department of Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Maryland