

## **ICHEM / CRiAC / Organization Studies Seminar**

### **Choice for All: Users as Consumers of Public Services in the UK and Elsewhere**

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#### **Abstract**

There is a widespread belief that users of public services want to be treated as consumers when choosing where and how they will be treated or educated and who will provide social care to them. Drawing on psychosocial perspectives relating to the embodiment of vulnerability, I show that while most users want better information about choices available and want to be more involved in making the decision as to which option to follow, there is no evidence that greater choice will, in itself, improve the quality of services. For how far patients behave as consumers depends on the severity of their illness, the nature of the procedure involved and their individual circumstances. More severely ill patients face complex treatment options and prefer decisions to be made on their behalf by a well-informed and trusted health professional. Further, although there is no social gradient when patients express their interest in choice, the pre-existing inequalities of education and income are likely to have an impact on access to information enabling health choices for different groups. Overall, the experience of user choice in public services including health and education indicates that wealthy and educated populations are likely to be the main beneficiaries of a policy of extending choice, unless specific measures are introduced to help disadvantaged groups interpret and make use of information.

#### **Biography**

Marianna Fotaki is Professor of Business Ethics at Warwick Business School, UK, and holds a visiting professorship at The University of Manchester. She is a graduate of medicine, public health and has obtained a PhD in public policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research is on the marketization of public services, health inequalities, gender and otherness in organizations, and business in society. She has published over 30 papers on those subjects and has four books forthcoming: a monograph, on *Fantasy and Reality of Patient Choice* (Edward Elgar) *Gender and the Organization* (with Nancy Harding, Routledge), *Affect in Organizations* (co-edited with Kate Kenny, Palgrave) and *Global Challenges to Business in Society* (with Kate Kenny and Juliane Reinecke, SAGE). Marianna co-directs pro bono an online think tank Centre for Health and the Public Interest <http://chpi.org.uk> and is a Network Fellow at Edmond J. Safra Centre for Ethics, Harvard University in 2014-15 where she completes a project on institutional corruption in different cultural and organizational settings.