UK healthcare makes expensive progress, says today’s EU ranking

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The UK climbed in the ranking among the healthcare systems of Europe when the 2012 Euro Health Consumer Index (EHCI) was presented today in the European Parliament in Brussels. The comparison gave the Netherlands 872 out of potentially 1,000 points, followed by Denmark (822), Iceland (799), Luxembourg (791) and Belgium (783). The Index placed the UK 12th out of 34 countries, advancing from rank 14 in the last measurement (2009). The Netherlands win the EHCI for the third time in a row. The EHCI has been published since 2005 by the Sweden-based think-tank Health Consumer Powerhouse (HCP).

UK is level with Ireland and Austria and scores 721 points from potentially 1,000. Behind the improved position is among the best access in Europe to healthcare information and use of e-Health services such as e-prescriptions and electronic health records. Another area of significant improvement is the Range and Reach of public healthcare services, measured as the coverage of mammography, how many patients who can have a kidney transplant, the equity of healthcare etc. The increased government spending on NHS has paid off, finds the EHCI. But in some fields UK remains behind:

- The waiting time situation has improved somewhat, to a high tax payer cost, says Dr Arne Björnberg, HCP COO and head of the EHCI team. During the last three years there has been some improvement but UK is still a definite part of European “healthcare waiting time territory”. Our polls show that UK patients are far from satisfied with the situation!

- Medical outcomes are still insufficient for a highly developed country. UK seems to have fallen behind on infant vaccination, which is alarming. And though generally good access to medicines, the deployment of new cancer drugs still is deplorable, concludes Dr Bjornberg.

General improvement – with warning signs

The EHCI reflects a continuous improvement of European healthcare, with better outcomes and overall conditions. Alarm signals concerning the impact from the economic downturns seem a bit exaggerated. For decades, healthcare has talked of budget cuts and loss of quality when in reality performance has been improving both in quantity and quality. However, the Index points to three distinct areas of special concern in the wake of the crisis:

- Tendencies of longer waiting times for elective (expensive) surgery among countries most affected by the economic downturn

- Slight tendencies of increased share of private (out of pocket) payment for healthcare services

- Lack of improvement and even deterioration of access to new medicines.

For half the 34 measured countries EHCI puts a red alert for the risk of resistant hospital infections.

- An EU directive to enforce the ban on sales of antibiotics without a prescription, would bring this figure down, claims Mr. Johan Hjertqvist, HCP founder and president. This would contribute more to patient safety than most other things the EU engages in!
About the Index

The EHCI has become a measurement standard for European healthcare. The 2012 edition ranks 34 national European health care systems on 42 indicators, covering five areas that are key to the health consumer: Patients’ rights and information, Accessibility (waiting times) of treatment, Outcomes, Range and reach of services provided and Pharmaceuticals. The Index is compiled from a combination of public statistics, patient polls and independent research conducted by the Sweden-based think tank Health Consumer Powerhouse.

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For more information and the explanatory report: www.healthpowerhouse.com/ehci2012

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