Euro Health Consumer Index 2013: Ireland right behind UK on healthcare – dissatisfied patients tells the truth?

Brussels, November 28, 2013

Ireland ranks 14th in this year’s Euro Health Consumer Index, right behind the UK. Ireland is awarded position for improved outcomes but still waiting is too long. And the absence of abortion rights as another negative).

The 7th edition of the EHCI was presented today in Brussels. The Netherlands stays in top, gaining 870 out of potential 1 000 points. The Dutch were followed by Switzerland, Iceland, Denmark and Norway. The measurement includes 35 countries. Ireland achieves rank no 14 (down from 13 last year), 180 points behind the Netherlands.

Ireland is hanging on to its 14th place by the teeth. The country has good official statistics on waiting times all over healthcare, and that data has been allowed to prevail.

– However, for several EHCI years, Irish patient organisations have been radically more pessimistic in their responses to the survey conducted as part of EHCI research. It is well known that customers/patients have long memories for less good things, but if the same pessimistic results reoccur in 2014, doubts must be raised on the validity of official Irish statistics, warns Dr Arne Bjornberg, HCP chairman and head of research.

Strong and weak sides

According to the EHCI, Irish healthcare has improved treatment outcomes, made progress on the range and reach of services and is among the leaders in use of modern, prescribed medicines. There is special need for improvement on patient rights and information as well as waiting.

– EHCI looks on abortion as a necessary available option, with evident relevance to citizen’s rights as well as popular health, explains Dr Arne Bjornberg. The measurement punishes countries where abortion is used as a contraceptive as well as countries – such as Ireland – prohibiting abortion.

The fact that Ireland has the highest % of population purchasing duplicate healthcare insurance also presents a problem: should that be regarded as an extreme case of dissatisfaction with the public system, or simply as a technical solution for progressive taxation?
Insurance-based healthcare systems superior?

Healthcare systems funded by insurance ("Bismarck systems") seem increasingly superior to tax-funded systems ("Beveridge") in the EHCI. There are successful tax-funded healthcare systems, but mostly in small, affluent countries, such as Denmark, Iceland and Norway. The clear majority of the top-performing healthcare countries are insurance-based, such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and France. (For the full ranking, see below).

Crisis impact

For the first time since 2005 when measurements started, the Euro Health Consumer Index (EHCI) can now detect a growing healthcare gap between the affluent, financially strong parts of Europe and the less affluent, crisis-struck parts. In 2013, there are hardly any medium-income countries in the top half of the Index. Treatment results such as cancer and infant survival keep improving all over Europe. In times of austerity, high-income countries show stronger improvement, causing a widening of the gap to low and medium income European countries.
About HCP

The EHCI has become an “industry standard” of modern healthcare monitoring since the start in 2005. The Index is compiled from a combination of public statistics, patient polls and independent research conducted by Health Consumer Powerhouse Ltd, a Sweden-based private company, measuring the performance of healthcare in Europe and Canada to support patient and consumer empowerment.

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The EHCI material is published on the HCP website: www.healthpowerhouse.com. It is freely available and anybody is welcome to quote it, referring to the source.

For questions and information:
Arne Bjornberg: +46 70 584 84 51; arne.bjornberg@healthpowerhouse.com
Johan Hjertqvist: +46 70 752 18 99; johan.hjertqvist@healthpowerhouse.com