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Bleak performance by UK in the European Union consumer friendly healthcare rankings

Brussels, 1st October 2007

In the Euro Health Consumer Index for 2007, the annual survey of EU healthcare, the United Kingdom healthcare service ranked 17th out of 29 countries for their public healthcare systems – a poorer performance than 2006. Despite excelling in providing information to patients, the quality of their healthcare service lags far behind many of their northern European neighbours.

The 2007 Index winner is Austria, followed by the Netherlands (winner in 2005), France (winner in 2006), Switzerland, Germany and Sweden.

UK healthcare remains mediocre, according to the 2007 Index, launched today in Brussels. Despite class-leading performance in patient information, the system falls down on other major key indicators of quality, including waiting times.

In five categories, covering 27 performance indicators, UK scores 581 points out of a potential 1,000, compared to 806 for winners Austria. That puts the UK in a similar league to Hungary, Italy and Slovenia. On a positive note, the UK healthcare system is once again at the forefront of patient access to information, via NHS direct, a patient ombudsman and quality rankings for providers such as scorecards for every hospital.

However, where the UK lets its patients down is by poor access to new treatments, especially in cancer – 5-year survival rates for cancer in UK score poorly – longer than necessary waiting times. Rates of MRSA infections also remain an issue.

"Patients in the UK have the right to expect more. Despite substantial funding increases, UK still is a mediocre overall performer", states Dr. Arne Björnberg the Euro Health Consumer Index Director. “It may be that this represents the end of the road for the rationing approach which the UK has pursued.”

What should be done in United Kingdom?

"There will be a policy review on access to new cancer drugs. That is a welcome development – the present “post code lottery” is unacceptable. Access has to be for all, and should be rapidly out in place” says the president of the Health Consumer Powerhouse, Mr Johan Hjertqvist.

About the Index

The Euro Health Consumer Index is the annual ranking of national European healthcare systems across five areas that are key to the consumer: patients’ rights and information, waiting times for common treatments, care outcomes, the generosity of the system and access to medication. It was first published in 2005. The Index is compiled from a combination of public statistics and
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independent research and is presented in a consumer friendly matrix. The Index is produced by the (Brussels-based) analysis and information organisation Health Consumer Powerhouse. The Index takes a consumer-centred position.

To view/download the 2007 Index and the explanatory report: www.healthpowerhouse.com/ehci

About the Health Consumer Powerhouse: www.healthpowerhouse.com

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