Ireland comes bottom of European Union consumer-friendly healthcare contest

Euro Health Consumer Index 2006 reveals that “Ireland has severe waiting list problems and poor medical outcomes” and invites Europeans to have their say on healthcare reform.

The Euro Health Consumer Index, the annual survey of EU healthcare, gives the Irish healthcare system one of the worst rankings among the public healthcare systems across the Union. In this overall survey of 26 European countries, the Republic of Ireland comes in at number 25. The 2006 Index winner is France, with the Netherlands (the 2005 winner), Germany and Sweden hot on its heels. Ireland is a newcomer to the Euro Health Consumer Index, which was launched today in Brussels. Care consumers now have an opportunity to put their views across to their governments.

In five categories, covering 28 performance indicators, Ireland scores 359 points out of a potential 750. The Irish healthcare system gets full points for one single indicator: the subsidy level for medicines. Otherwise Irish care consumers have little to be happy about: waiting times are long, medical outcomes bleak with bad scores for the level of infant deaths, MRSA infections in hospitals and the penetration of polio vaccination among children. As far as patient rights and information is concerned, Ireland lacks a patient ombudsman as well as the right to a second opinion or a 24/7 telephone or Web-based healthcare information service.

“Unfortunately, with its severe waiting list problems and less than fantastic outcomes quality, Ireland does not score very well. The Health Service Executive reform will hopefully go some way towards changing this”, states Dr Arne Björnberg, the Euro Health Consumer Index Director.

What should be done in Ireland?

On the basis of the Index findings, the Health Consumer Powerhouse (HCP), the Index provider, puts forward suggestions for each country on how to empower the healthcare consumer and improve the system. For Ireland, the action points are:

- Cut waiting times
- Develop a no fault malpractice insurance
- Set up a patient ombudsman
- Make sure all children are given a polio vaccination

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Call for action:

Via www.healthpowerhouse.com, care consumers the width and breadth of Europe can send a message to their Ministry of Health on what actions should be taken. This is the first time that health consumers across Europe are invited to participate in a campaign to reform European healthcare systems to make them more consumer-friendly.

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 independent research and produced by the (Brussels-based) analysis and information organisation Health Consumer Powerhouse. It sets out to take a consumer-centred position.

To view/download the 2006 Index and the explanatory report: www.healthpowerhouse.com/ehci

About the Health Consumer Powerhouse: www.healthpowerhouse.com

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