

Volume 1 / Issue 1 Spring 2006 - Country Focus: UK

Facts & Figures: The UK Healthcare System

Healthcare System

In the UK, the whole population is covered by the National Health System (NHS), which is financed through general taxation and run by the Department of Health. However, responsibility for the purchasing of health care services across the UK rests at the constituent country level: Primary Care Trusts in England, Health Boards in Scotland, local health groups in Wales and Primary Care Partnerships in Northern Ireland. Despite this coverage, there is an increasing trend towards private care and coverage, with 12% of the population contracting additional private health insurance.

Healthcare Facilities, Services & Staff

Throughout the UK, there is a coexistence of public hospitals, private non-profit hospitals and private for-profit hospitals. While hospitals are mainly publicly owned and independently operated, they are organised as hospital trusts with three hierarchical levels: community hospitals, district hospitals, and regional or inter-regional hospitals, as well as a number of specialised hospitals offering advanced treatment.

Primary care services are provided mainly by General Practitioners (GPs), who also act as “gatekeepers” in providing access to secondary care. Across the UK, there are approximately 3.1 million healthcare and social assistance employees, representing 11% of national employment and 1.4 million employees in the hospital sector, with 67% of all physicians working in hospitals.

The UK at a Glance	
Population:	59.3 million
Live births:	11.3%
Death rate:	10.2%
Life expectancy:	77 years for men / 81 years for women
GDP:	1,590 billion euros
GDP per capita:	26,800 euros
Total healthcare expenditure:	7.7% of GDP
Healthcare expenditure per capita:	2,200 PPP euros
Inpatient care expenditure per capita:	880 euros
% of healthcare system financed by public funds:	83%
Number of equipment & scanners per million population:	4.6 MRI 4.9 radiology equipment 6.2 scanners
Number of hospitals:	481 hospital trusts and 230 private institutions
Number of beds:	230,000 acute care beds (public beds 96%, private beds 4% of all beds)
Number of beds per 1,000 population:	2.4%
Rate of occupancy:	81%
Length of stay:	5.0 days
Number of acute care hospital admissions:	214 admissions % population
Waiting list:	Significant: 1.1 million patients on waiting lists

Administration

Regulation of the healthcare system is decentralised; also carried out at the constituent country level by: the Strategic Health Authorities in England, the Area Health Boards in Scotland, the Local Health Boards in Wales and the Health and National Services Boards in Northern Ireland.

The Role of IT

The NHS has been undergoing drastic changes in the way it operates in order to improve the services it provides and give patients more control over their healthcare. On 1 April 2005 the Department of Health created NHS Connecting for Health – which is responsible for the delivery of the National Programme for IT. Tasked with creating a multi-billion pound IT infrastructure in order to increase efficiency and effectiveness in healthcare services across the UK, the National Programme for IT is responsible for:

- + creating an NHS Care Records Service to improve the sharing of patient records across the NHS with their consent;
- + making it easier and faster for GPs and other primary care staff to book hospital appointments for patients;
- + providing a system for the electronic transmission of prescriptions, and
- + ensuring that the IT infrastructure can meet NHS needs now and in the future.

More information on the NHS Connecting for Health Programme is available on their website at www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk

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