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## Sweden's Government Health Care

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Government health care advocates used to sing the praises of Britain's National Health Service (NHS). That's until its poor delivery of health care services became known. A recent study by David Green and Laura Casper, "Delay, Denial and Dilution," written for the London-based Institute of Economic Affairs, concludes that the NHS health care services are just about the worst in the developed world. The head of the World Health Organization calculated that Britain has as many as 25,000 unnecessary cancer deaths a year because of under-provision of care. Twelve percent of specialists surveyed admitted refusing kidney dialysis to patients suffering from kidney failure because of limits on cash. Waiting lists for medical treatment have become so long that there are now "waiting lists" for the waiting list.

Government health care advocates sing the praises of Canada's single-payer system. Canada's government system isn't that different from Britain's. For example, after a Canadian has been referred to a specialist, the waiting list for gynecological surgery is four to 12 weeks, cataract removal 12 to 18 weeks, tonsillectomy three to 36 weeks and neurosurgery five to 30 weeks. Toronto-area hospitals, concerned about lawsuits, ask patients to sign a legal release accepting that while delays in treatment may jeopardize their health, they nevertheless hold the hospital blameless. Canadians have an option Britainers don't: close proximity of American hospitals. In fact, the Canadian government spends over \$1 billion each year for Canadians to receive medical treatment in our country. I wonder how much money the U.S. government spends for Americans to be treated in Canada.

"OK, Williams," you say, "Sweden is the world's socialist wonder." Sven R. Larson tells about some of Sweden's problems in "Lesson from Sweden's Universal Health System: Tales from the Health-care Crypt," published in the *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons* (Spring 2008). Mr. D., a Gothenburg multiple sclerosis patient, was prescribed a new drug. His doctor's request was denied because the drug was 33 percent more expensive than the older medicine. Mr. D. offered to pay for the medicine himself but was prevented from doing so. The bureaucrats said it would set a bad precedent and lead to unequal access to medicine.

Malmö, with its 280,000 residents, is Sweden's third-largest city. To see a physician, a patient must go to one of two local clinics before they can see a specialist. The clinics have security guards to keep patients from getting unruly as they wait hours to see a doctor. The guards also prevent new patients from entering the clinic when the waiting room is considered full. Uppsala, a city with 200,000 people, has only one specialist in mammography. Sweden's National Cancer Foundation reports that in a few years most Swedish women will not have access to mammography.

Dr. Olle Stendahl, a professor of medicine at Linköping University, pointed out a side effect of government-run medicine: its impact on innovation. He said, "In our budget-government health care there is no room for curious, young physicians and other professionals to challenge established views. New knowledge is not attractive but typically considered a problem (that brings) increased costs and disturbances in today's slimmed-down health care."

These are just a few of the problems of Sweden's single-payer government-run health care system. I wonder how many Americans would like a system that would, as in the case of Mr. D. of Gothenburg, prohibit private purchase of your own medicine if the government refused paying. We have problems in our health care system but most of them are a result of too much government. Over 50 percent of health care expenditures in our country are made by government. Government health care advocates might say that they will avoid the horrors of other government-run systems. Don't believe them.

The American Association of Physicians and Surgeons, who published Sven Larson's paper, is a group of liberty-oriented doctors and health care practitioners who haven't sold their members down the socialist river as have other medical associations. They deserve our thanks for being a major player in the '90s defeat of "Hillary care."

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