

NHS waiting data highlights need for reform says new think tank film

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Today's new data showing a fall in waiting times for NHS diagnostics is welcome but somewhat misleading, according to the Stockholm Network, a British pro-market think tank. Its research suggests that overall improvements in NHS waiting times are largely down to an increased use of spare capacity in Britain's independent sector.

The greater use of independent sector treatment centres and hospitals means that in recent years NHS waiting lists have been significantly reduced. In contrast to a decade ago when more than a million people experienced unacceptable delays, today, more than 80% of patients needing hospital treatment will have been admitted within 18 weeks of referral by a GP.. However, while partnership working with the independent sector is proven to be a success, the Stockholm Network believes that politicians must now go further and allow NHS patients to have a greater say on how money is spent.

The Stockholm Network's vision for the future is one in which the health system can draw on a range of both public and private funding. Spending power would in the long-run be placed into the hands of patients through the build up of individual funds, called Health Saving Accounts (HSAs). For those on low incomes the government would provide a contribution to enable all patients to contribute to a health savings culture:

“This would allow for efficiency, brought about through competition, and equity by providing a minimum level of support. Such a model, has been working successfully in Singapore for almost 20 years.”

Launching an online documentary about HSAs at: <http://www.stockholm-network.org/player/videoplayer.html> the Stockholm Network argues that the introduction of such a scheme will truly empower patients and enable them to obtain value for money.

Arguing that HSAs naturally build on government-inspired saving schemes such as ISAs and the Child Trust Fund, Stockholm Network CEO, Helen Disney concludes:

“While it is great that this government has encouraged unprecedented levels of private sector partnership for the benefit of NHS patients, it is now vital that our politicians build on this foundation and encourage Health Savings Accounts for the benefit of all. Health consumerism and genuine choice need to be encouraged by a practical system that enables money to directly follow patients. Only through widening the pool of money available for healthcare will we be able to put people in charge, open up the health market to real choice and drive up standards through contestability and competition.”

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For quotes and commentary on the above, please call Cara Walker, Head of Media and Communication on 00 44 20 7354 8888 or: cara@stockholm-network.org and for further information on the Stockholm Network, please visit: www.stockholm-network.org

Notes to Editors:

The Stockholm Network is the leading pan-European think tank. It offers a unique network of 135 + market-oriented think tanks across Europe providing access to the best European policy thinking.

The Stockholm Network is launching the documentary entitled: **Saving the health of the nation: An introduction to Health Savings Accounts**, this evening at the Social Market Foundation, 11 Tufton Street, Westminster, SW1P 3QB from 6:30 – 8:00pm. The participants in this debate will include:

- Liz Kendall, former special adviser to The Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt MP;
- Stephen Pollard, former Research Director of the Fabian Society and President of Centre for the New Europe;
- Geraint Day, health spokesman for the Institute of Directors.