

The UK is placed just 28th out of 30 OECD countries for healthcare resourcing, according to latest EIU research

A new report, *The NHS: How does it compare?* from The Economist Intelligence Unit (The EIU), has found that the UK has fewer doctors, nurses, hospital beds and crucial medical equipment than most other wealthy nations.

As politicians argue over healthcare statistics in the run-up to May's general election, it's hard to get a clear picture of where the National Health Service (the NHS) stands. The Economist Intelligence Unit has therefore published a new report which ranks the UK's healthcare system against those of other wealthy countries in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in terms of spending, resourcing and outcomes.

Resourcing emerges as the biggest issue for the next UK government. Although staffing is the biggest single cost for the NHS, the UK had just 2.8 doctors and 8.2 nurses per 10,000 population in 2012, compared with OECD averages of 3.2 and 8.9.

The situation is even worse when it comes to physical resources, where the UK ranked near the bottom of the OECD league. The UK has just 2.8 hospital beds per 1,000 population against an OECD average of 4.8. As for equipment, such as computerised tomography (CT) scanners and magnetic resonance image (MRI) units, the UK's density - at 6.8 and 8.7 per million population, is less than half the OECD average.

Overall, The EIU report ranks the UK at just 28th out of 30 OECD countries for healthcare resourcing, whereas it ranks 16th out of 30 on healthcare spending. This suggests that the UK isn't getting the best value for money. For example, the data suggests that self-employed UK doctors are the most expensive in the OECD. Although this may be related to their workload, this high expenditure will make it harder to increase doctor numbers in the future.

Switzerland and Japan came top of the rankings on many of the factors studied in the report. Switzerland spends heavily on healthcare; Japan spends less than the UK per head, but its healthcare system is very generous in terms of resources, such as hospital beds, equipment and nurses. Both countries have longer life expectancy and better patient outcomes than the UK.

Other findings from the report include:

The UK has lagged behind countries such as France and Germany in terms of health spending over the past five years. However, this mainly reflects slow private spending on health, rather than a lack of public funding through the NHS.

The UK is mediocre in terms of outcomes. Life expectancy is lower than in countries such as Japan, where older people are also healthier than in Britain. The UK's cancer mortality rates are also higher than the OECD average, although diabetes outcomes are good.

One area where the UK does well is equity. The NHS principle of free care at the point of use means the gap between the care received by those on low incomes and those on higher incomes is smaller than in most other OECD countries.

"Although recruitment has already picked up, it is clear that NHS resources are very stretched compared with those in other OECD countries," says Ana Nicholls, the report's author.

"A tight government budget will make it hard for politicians to fulfil their promises of extra funding, but resourcing will only become a bigger issue as the population ages.

Nevertheless, there are areas where the UK could be getting better value for its money, such as better links between local and national commissioning systems, and better coordination between health and social services. The new government will need to tackle these challenges without causing more disruption to NHS services."