

# Care in Europe is safer than NHS, death rates reveal

Chris Smyth Health Editor

About 9,000 people die needlessly every year because the NHS is not as good as other European health systems, a report claims.

The analysis by a free-market think-tank urged Britain to get over its “insular and inward-looking” attitude to healthcare.

A collective hysteria about the NHS stopped Britain realising that countries such as Germany, Holland and Switzerland had proved that universal healthcare could be achieved more effectively in an insurance system, it claims.

People should stop feeling grateful to the NHS as if the alternative were a US-style system or no healthcare at all. A continental model is a more realistic benchmark, says a report for the Institute for Economic Affairs.

“People are in love with the NHS,” said Kristian Niemietz, the author of the report and senior research fellow at the institute. “But if they compared it with other similar systems they would find it wasn’t so great.”

Dr Niemietz said that patient care had been held back by misleading debate about the alternatives to a state-run system, which ignores the European experience where hospitals and insurers are run by private companies and charities.

“People compare the NHS to some absurdly low benchmark, such as healthcare in the Middle Ages, rather than looking at comparable countries

with healthcare systems based on comparable values,” he said.

“A Swiss person would never say ‘the Swiss healthcare system saved my life’, they would say ‘this hospital, or this surgeon or this medicine saved my life’.

“Britain is not the only country that has achieved universal access to healthcare, but Britain is probably the only country where this is celebrated as if it were a unique achievement.”

He compared data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on Britain with figures on Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, which combine insurance-based systems — where insurers and hospitals are independent of government — with regulation and subsidies to ensure that everyone is treated.

Patients with cancer, heart disease and stroke are less likely to survive in Britain than in those countries and are more likely to suffer complications such as blood clots, the figures show. There are 14 more preventable deaths per 100,000 people in Britain than in Germany — about 9,000 deaths a year.

Dr Niemietz urged reforms to move Britain towards a social insurance system, arguing: “You have a much higher degree of competition and the benefit of the patient as consumer.”

Mark Littlewood, the director-general of the think-tank, said: “When it comes to proposing serious solutions to enhance the quality of the NHS, politicians have been blind to the experiences of our European counterparts.”

## Drug firm ‘tried to block tests’

Kat Lay Health Correspondent

A drug company has been accused of trying to “scupper” independent tests on a blindness drug that could save the NHS £102 million a year.

Trials have shown Avastin, a cancer drug, to be just as good at treating wet age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of blindness in the elderly, as Lucentis — but at tenth of the cost. According to a *BMJ* article: “Man-

ufacturers didn’t want to do the trials themselves, and when public funds were found they did all they could to scupper them.”

Both drugs are owned by Roche, but Lucentis is marketed in the UK by Novartis. Emails show clinicians linked to Novartis urging primary care trusts to pull out of one trial, the *BMJ* claimed.

Novartis said that it took the allegations seriously and was “closely reviewing the content of the article”.



## No hospital bed means boy sleeps on the floor

**A** severely disabled boy has spent seven days sleeping on the floor after a hospital failed to provide a suitable bed.

Cody Neatis, from Preston, Lancashire, was admitted to Royal Preston Hospital last Thursday with a chest infection — but has had to sleep on a mattress on the floor since then.

Cody, eight, who has Down’s syndrome, epilepsy, autism and is fed through a tube, was left without a bed because staff do not have the special cot he needs to keep him safe in his sleep.

His mother, Lynne, 48,

has had to sleep on the floor alongside him for the past week to prevent her son injuring himself.

“This situation has been an ongoing one for years with this hospital and I don’t understand why they still don’t have a suitable bed,” she said.

“I have to sleep on the floor with him and I have had to fight for a nurse or healthcare assistant to be with us during the night to watch him too as I can’t stay awake for 24 hours.”

She and her husband Stephen, 45, who have six children, are full-time carers to their two youngest sons, Cody and Dexter, seven, who is also disabled and has autism



Cody Neatis, above on the hospital floor, and left with his father, Stephen. The eight-year-old boy needs a special bed to keep him safe while he is asleep

and ADHD. At home Cody sleeps in a specialist bed that cost £3,000.

Karen Partington, chief executive at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said:

“We are awaiting delivery of a specialist bed from America and we have discussed a number of alternatives with Cody’s family, which have been declined.”

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