

# ***HEALTH CARE***

## **NEWS AND INFORMATION**

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*Health Care: News and Information* is a service of the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) to help our readers stay fully informed about the latest health care issues as we work to advance a high-quality health care system.

Jim Edwards, Editor

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## **British Health System Rations Care, Faces Pest Problems**

**A British ophthalmologist has learned firsthand “the injustice inherent in our [health] system and the devastation it can cause.”**

- This medical professional has run head-on into the bureaucratic difficulties Britons face every day from their government-run health system — in which she works.
- The English eye doctor told her father’s cancer nightmare in the Daily Mail newspaper in May.
- It’s an instructive tale that every American needs to hear. And every advocate of “single-payer” health reform should learn from this example.

**In Britain’s government-run health system, it’s not uncommon “that a life could be decided by something as arbitrary as one’s address.”**

- The English have a term for it: postcode lottery. Patients receive or are refused treatments based on where they live — by the equivalent of their ZIP code.
- Each area’s Primary Care Trust decides whether the government system will fund certain medicines and therapies. These minibureaucracies each make up the rules as they go along.
- In this case, an older cancer drug that’s less effective and has bad side effects costs a lot less than the newer medication. So the bureaucracy won’t pay for the new one.

**Like many other patients, this British eye specialist’s father is suffering at the hands of a government-run health system.**

- Only a new cancer drug would improve this man’s situation. It would fight the remaining cancer that chemotherapy doesn’t work for, slow the cancer’s bad effects and avoid an older drug’s side effects. The older medicine makes people feel like they have the flu. But the bureaucrats refuse.
- This local bureau arbitrarily decided it wouldn’t pay for the drug. Nationally, British health bureaucrats funded the drug for fewer than 200 of some 3,100 cancer patients.

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- While 35 local bureaus have paid for this new cancer drug, 65 have refused. A grandmother

called “the refusal of her [local bureau] to fund [the drug] . . . tantamount to manslaughter.”

- There, you can’t merely buy the better medicine yourself. “[The National Health Service] told us that if we pay for the drug the NHS will not pay for any of his care. All blood tests, scans and doctors’ visits will have to be paid for as well. The NHS will wash its hands of him.”

**Besides bureaucratic rationing, Britain’s health system suffers from pest infestation in its government-run hospitals.**

- A new report found about 20,000 cases of pest infestation in NHS hospitals the past two years.
- About three-fourths of government hospitals each called pest control at least 50 times (or about every other week).
- Some 80 percent had ants, 77 percent had mice, 66 percent rats and 65 percent cockroaches. Other pests included bedbugs, fleas, silverfish, squirrels and foxes.
- Reports found rats and wasps in maternity wards, mice in sterile storage areas and roaches in places like a urology unit.

**Those enamored with government-run health care need to wake up to the realities of the “remedy” they’re advocating. In Britain, firsthand experience has shown that it’s “not just unfair, it is cruel.” The eye doctor seeing the injustices of government-run health care through her father’s case put it starkly: “If Dad should lose his life to cancer, it would be devastating but to lose his life to bureaucracy would be far, far worse.”**

*The Healthcare Leadership Council, representing the innovators in each sector of the health care industry, is committed to advancing a market-based health care system that values innovation and provides affordable, high-quality care.*

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