

Sweden used to have a well deserved pride in it's health care system

but this may not any longer be the case. Why did things go this way and what can we about it?

I had a long discussion about it with a good friend while we were on a photo trip to Iceland. My friend voiced his opinion about the desolate stateof health care in Sweden.

To keep the discussion in context at that time health care in Sweden started to prioritize. In some parts of the country it was decided that patients may have operation on a single eye but not on both, for instance.

Now, recent developments in health care lead to significant raise in cost and it may be obvious that priorities may need to be made. We may not be able to afford some specialised and expensive healthcare for some people and at the same time limit basic health care for a large part of the population. So what can be done?

- Spending can be increased but that money needs to be taken from some other sector or raised by increasing taxes.
- The resources may be used more efficiently.

My friend was firmly opposed to raising taxes. He also was strongly against "rationalising" as he felt that the personneel within health care were underplayed and overworked, in all probability not without reason. This discussion on Iceland is the starting point of todays blog.

Swedish spending on health care and the backlash of the 90-es

I checked with Wikipedia and some summary reports from OECD on Swedish expenditure in the health care system, what I found was that:

- Sweden had a quite normal level of expenditure, as percentage of BNP, on health care
- Sweden has a comparable number of doctors / thousand inhabitants to most OECD nations

The OECD paper made two interesting observations, however:

- Sweden was very succesfull in increasing life exceptecy for it's citisens, so it has a very upward shifted age distribution
- Swedish doctors spend much less time with patients compared to other OECD countries

In the early 90-es Sweden went trough a self inflicted economic crisis, leading to a rapid increase in government debth and a serious collapse of BNP. Government savings hurt healthcare, childcare and education among other things. It's my impression that helath care is one of the last sectors to recover from that crisis.

Swedish doctors spend 17 hours a week with patients but Danish doctors spend 34 hours a week

I discussed this with a coallegue of mine, he pointed out the above relation to me. His suggestion was simple that we should replace Swedish doctors with Danish doctors. This suggestion is a bit simplicistic, but it's actually in line with the OECD recommendations I mentioned earlier. We probably should have better incentives for doctors to actually work with patients.

The sorry state of Sweden's health care system

Written by Administrator
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