

## NHS: UK now has one of the worst healthcare systems in the developed world, according to OECD report

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The UK has one of the worst healthcare systems in the developed world according to a damning new report which said the nation has an “outstandingly poor” record of preventing ill health.

Hospitals are now so short-staffed and underequipped that people are also dying needlessly because of a chronic lack of investment. The verdict, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), will make embarrassing reading for David Cameron who denied the cash-strapped NHS is heading for its worst winter crisis.

Staff are too rushed to improve levels of care that have in many areas fallen below countries such as Turkey, Portugal and Poland. Almost 75,000 more doctors and nurses are needed to match standards in similar countries, the OECD said in a study comparing the quality of healthcare across 34 countries.

While access to care is “generally good” the quality of care in the UK is “poor to mediocre” across several key health areas, obesity levels are “dire” and the NHS struggles to get even the “basics” right, the report said citing a lack of investment over the last six years.

The organisation called for “urgent attention” to combat high rates of smoking, harmful alcohol consumption and obesity, which are all above the OECD average, to reduce premature mortality in the United Kingdom.

Mark Pearson, an OECD official, said many medics were too rushed to improve the care they give. He said: “At the moment in the NHS I think there is the risk that people do not have the time to do that. What they are doing is going through the processes ... rather than being a learning organisation, an organisation that can improve.”

NHS funding had remained static between 2009 and 2013, the OECD report said. Mr Pearson said the UK was spending “considerably less” than many OECD countries and that “you get what you pay for” in healthcare.

The OECD average number of nurses and doctors is 9.1 and 3.3 per 1,000 population respectively, while the figure in the UK is 8.2 and 2.8. Nine countries including Greece, Italy and Portugal have more doctors per head.

(...) Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has written to all 50,000 junior doctors in England in a last ditch attempt to persuade them not to take industrial action. Mr Hunt’s letter includes fresh clarification on what the changes involve to their new contracts, due to come into effect next August, and a few concessions. Basic pay is to rise by 11 per cent, but other elements, including what constitutes unsociable hours, are being curbed.

“... Too many lives are still lost because the quality of care is not improving fast enough,” the report said. “Survival following diagnosis for cancer has increased in the United Kingdom over the past 10 years, but the UK still remains in the bottom third of OECD countries in five-year relative survival for colorectal cancer, breast cancer and cervical cancer, though survival rates are improving at least as fast as the OECD average.”

David Cameron refused to answer Jeremy Corbyn at Prime Minister’s questions when the Labour leader asked whether he could guarantee there would be no winter crisis in the NHS. Mr Cameron said the NHS was benefiting from an injection of £10bn not supported by Labour at the last election.

A Department of Health spokesperson said: “We are making the NHS the safest healthcare system in the world which is why we have invested £10 billion to fund the NHS’s own plan for its future. (...) The OECD report shows there are many indicators where the NHS continues to be the envy of the world.”