

SWEDEN'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM - PEOPLE OPTING FOR PRIVATE CARE

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One of the primary reasons isn't the level of care, but access to that care. And the problem being identified is [lack of incentive](#) to increase efficiency.

Waiting times for medical care in Sweden are the longest in Europe, according to the Health Consumer Powerhouse, which analyzes health-care systems in the region. About 33,000 people had been waiting more than three months for surgery or other major treatments at the end of August, an increase of 43 percent from May, a report by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions showed.

Critics of Sweden's welfare model say there are no incentives for hospitals to improve efficiency. Oscar Hjertqvist, director of the Health Consumer Powerhouse, likens the current system to a bad restaurant getting government funding.

"In Sweden, you would get paid just to have a restaurant, but there would be no requirements that people should get any food," said Hjertqvist, whose group has offices in Brussels and Stockholm.

Consequently people in Sweden, especially the wealthy, are opting for private care:

Jorun Lindell got fed up with Swedish health care the day her son Harald waited four hours to be treated at a Stockholm emergency ward. His knees and ankles were swollen "like soccer balls."

"We were hysterical because we didn't know what was wrong and no one would help us," says Lindell, 39, whose 4-year-old whimpered with pain in a waiting room at the Astrid Lindgren Children's Hospital, named after the author of the Pippi Longstocking children's books.

Lindell is among the parents backing Sweden's first private hospital for children. Opening in the second half of 2008 in Stockholm's affluent Oestermalm district, Martina Children's Hospital will handle about 20,000 emergency cases a year, a third of Astrid Lindgren's case load.

Say the critics of such a move:

"The new hospital for the children of the upper classes is a mockery of the most fundamental values of the Swedish system," said Lars Ohly, leader of the Swedish Left Party. "Care should be given based on needs, not wallets."

Really? Well care based on need is no care at all if you don't have access. And where that is the case (and it appears to be the case in most government run programs) people vote with their wallets. As you might imagine, Ohly would be happy to deny them that right.