

## **Primary Care in Europe Compared (PPG Meeting 4 Jan 2018)**

### **Healthcare spending as a proportion of GDP (2015)**

UK	9.8%
Netherlands	10.8%
France	11.0%
Denmark	10.6%
Germany	11.1%
Italy	9.1%
Sweden	11.1%
EU28	9.9%

### **Average no of practising doctors per 1K population (2016)**

UK	2.8
EU28	2.5
EU28 Lowest	2.0 eg Poland
EU28 Highest	4.0+ eg Germany, Sweden

### **Percentage of patients denied access to care because of cost, distance or waiting time (2016)**

UK	2.1%
EU28	3.6%

### **Percentage of patients unable to obtain same/next day primary care appointment**

UK	41.0%
Netherlands	19.0%

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### Practices

- UK 2005 10347 practices with average patient list of 6,094  
36,007 GP providers and 3,715 other GPs  
63m total registered patients
- UK 2015 9458 practices with average patient list of 7,183  
28,894 GP providers and 11,089 other GPs  
68m total registered patients
- Average EU practice size (2015) 1,687 patients (eg Netherlands 2,322, France 800)
- Most EU GPs are self-employed: key issue is an ageing provider group
- Minimum primary care opening hours apply in most EU countries but vary widely from 20 hpw in Austria to 52.5 hpw in the UK.
- Delivery of out of hours care varies widely.
- GPs as gatekeepers: in 11/31 European countries only GPs can refer patients to specialists (eg UK, Spain, Italy, Norway, Netherlands); in only 7 countries (eg Austria, Belgium, Germany) did patients have direct access to specialists
- There was little difference in the spread of services offered in most countries, with the UK, Spain, France, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Belgium offering the most comprehensive.

### Charges

- Only 4 European countries do not charge for drugs
- Most countries do not charge for home visits
- Where payment is made for access to primary care,
  - Irish payments make the highest formal payments, with 60%+ paying non-reimbursable fees of €45-60 per GP visit.
  - In Switzerland 66% of primary care practitioner costs are paid for out of pocket by patients, who have an annual allowance of €225-1875 beyond which they pay the first 10% of GP's fees up to an annual maximum of €525.
  - It is common in several countries, including France and Sweden, for patients to pay per GP visit.

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### France

- 3.4 GPs per 1K population
- 67% GPs self-employed
- 50%+ GPs (mainly younger doctors) in group practices
- Average practice of 2-3 GPs
- 75% practices made up only of physicians: remainder comprise teams of allied health professionals
- 15% average workload made up of home visits
- Self-employed GPs earn fees per service (€25) plus annual capitation payment (€40) for managing patients with chronic conditions plus maximum €5K pa for fulfilling a range of initiatives from generic prescribing to delivery of preventive services
- If GPs set up a practice in an under-represented region, they are eligible for €6,900 per month
- GPs employed in medical centres earn around €50K pa
- GP average income (2011) €82K pa, 94% from fees
- GPs refer patients to specialists
- Patients pay the full fee and claim reimbursement under state health insurance: for the poorest patients, the state pays the GP directly for consultations
- Costs generally covered through state health insurance range from 15% for cost of drugs with low medical benefit to 80% for cost of inpatient care, with patients exempted from paying from several specified conditions, eg chronic illness or pregnancy after the 5<sup>th</sup> month. VHI can be taken out by patients to cover costs not covered by SHI but patients on average still contribute 7.5% of their medical costs out of their own pocket. (The European average is more than 16% of total healthcare costs.) Funding for long term care comes partly from a dedicated fund created in 2004, supplemented by local authority funding and patient funding
- Out of hours care is delivered by emergency departments of public hospitals or private hospitals signed up to the scheme or self-employed GPs working for emergency services or state-financed medical homes

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### Germany

- Primary care delivered mainly by sole practitioners (60%) or dual practices (25%)
- Most practitioners employ doctor's assistants but other non-physicians will have their own premises
- Patients have free choice of GPs, specialists and hospitals. No registration is required. GPs have no gatekeeping function. But sickness funds must offer members the option of enrolling in a family physician care model which has been shown to deliver better services
- Practitioners are reimbursed on a fee per service basis according to a fee schedule negotiated between physicians and sickness funds which limit the patients per practice and the number of treatments per patient
- Average reimbursement per family physician is €200K pa, excluding income from private patients
- Physicians are reimbursed by billing their regional associations which in turn receive funds from the sickness funds. Patients pay directly for services/treatments not covered by the sickness funds
- Physicians are obliged to provide out of hours service

### Sweden

- Swedish healthcare is highly integrated
- Since the 1990s inpatient care has been shifted to outpatient and primary care with highly specialised care concentrated in specialist medical centres
- All provider fees are set by local authorities, resulting in wide regional variations
- Most public and private physicians, nurses and other health care staff are salaries employees
- Physicians earn average monthly salary of 63K Swedish kroner
- There is constraint on physicians seeing private patients outside their public practice
- 20% of funds spent on healthcare is spent on primary care
- No formal gatekeeping function
- Main form of practice is team-based (GPs, nurses, midwives, physios, psychologists, gynaecologists)
- Average primary care practice based around 4 GPs

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- 40% of 1200 primary care practices are privately owned

[Sources: Health at a Glance: Europe 2016, OECD; General Practice Trends in the UK to 2015, Health & Social Care Information Centre; [www.hspm.org](http://www.hspm.org) (European Observatory on Health Systems & Policies); [www.commonwealthfund.org](http://www.commonwealthfund.org); [www.kingsfund.org](http://www.kingsfund.org)]; [www.rmbf.org](http://www.rmbf.org) (Royal Medical Benevolent Fund)]