If You Thought U.S. Healthcare Was Bad, Try Poland's Universal Healthcare

By Alex Berezow, PhD — June 2, 2020

Universal healthcare, which is touted as a solution to all of America’s healthcare woes, is not necessarily a cure. Universal healthcare can be universally bad, as it is in Poland.

Welcome to the 3rd circle of healthcare hell

We like to complain about our healthcare system. Mostly, the complaints are directed at the outrageous costs and the slippery, backstabbing nature of insurance companies. But rarely do we complain about the quality of our healthcare. It is among the best -- if not the best -- in the world. Americans take it for granted.

Thanks to the coronavirus lockdown, I'm currently being held hostage on an extended stay in Poland. Our one-year-old daughter was sick last week with a high fever. A very good pediatrician visited us where we were staying and diagnosed her with roseola. He predicted that the fever would end after another day or so, and then a body rash would develop. He nailed it.

After she recovered, it was time for vaccines. At the clinic, we experienced the full backwardness of Polish healthcare. This pediatrician, who scared our child and acted as if she'd never treated a baby before, claimed that our daughter did not have roseola. According to her, our daughter had been vaccinated against roseola, so she diagnosed “three-day fever.”

There are three giant problems with that. First, there is no vaccine against roseola. Second, three-
day fever and roseola are the exact same disease. And third, she got roseola mixed up with rubella (against which my daughter was vaccinated). To add some extra icing on the cake, she refused to administer the vaccines to our child. Only nurses do that... and the nurse left for the day. Apparently, Poland has some sort of policy that doctors don't administer shots.

On the bright side, Polish healthcare is universal! (And the facilities are reminiscent of old-school insane asylums. See photo above.)

**Universal Healthcare Is Not Necessarily a Cure**

The point is that universal healthcare -- which is touted as a solution to all of America's healthcare woes -- is not necessarily a cure. Universal healthcare can be universally bad, as it is in Poland. Just how bad? *Foreign Policy* [1] describes it thusly:

> Poland, the eighth-largest economy in the European Union, ranked 32nd of 35 countries in the 2018 *Euro Health Consumer Index* [2], which compares European health care systems based on accessibility and wait times, patient rights, and health outcomes. Poland also has just 238 physicians per 100,000 inhabitants—the lowest ratio [3] in the EU.

Polish doctors are overworked and underpaid [4], which is why there is a shortage of specialists [5] in the country. (The shortage is particularly acute for pediatricians, anesthesiologists, and surgeons.) Many doctors leave for other EU countries [6]. Some of those who stay behind will accept payments under the table in exchange for faster, better treatment. This former socialist nation is now capitalist, after all.

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