



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 4, 2018

Sweden's Universal Healthcare System Goes the Way of All Others

Proponents of socialized medicine like to remind Americans that the United States [spends more per capita on healthcare than any other industrialized nation](#) without necessarily getting the best results. Instead, they suggest emulating European welfare states with their national healthcare systems.

According to a [report](#) from Agence France-Presse, however, one of the crown jewels of the welfare state, Sweden, spends extravagantly on healthcare yet finds its prized universal healthcare system succumbing to the same forces that have doomed all other such programs, with waiting lists growing ever longer and doctors, nurses, and hospitals becoming ever scarcer.



Swedes, on average, pay over half their income in taxes, and their government's healthcare spending is the third highest in the European Union. And what do they get for it?

AFP writes:

Swedish law stipulates patients should wait no more than 90 days to undergo surgery or see a specialist. Yet every third patient waits longer, according to government figures.

Patients must also see a general practitioner within seven days, the second-longest deadline in Europe after Portugal (15 days).

Try as they might, politicians cannot legislate away the law of supply and demand. With healthcare seemingly free, people tend to use more of it than necessary, driving costs up while failing to increase the supply of care. (In a free market, by contrast, higher prices would induce consumers to reduce their consumption and producers to increase their production, bringing prices back down.)

Thus, even the government's seemingly modest goals for timely care, known as the "Healthcare Guarantee," go unmet. As insurance executive Kent Andersson told the European news site [The Local](#), "The Healthcare Guarantee isn't a guarantee."

Twenty-three-year-old Asia Nader, for instance, told AFP that she had to wait a year for surgery to repair a hole in her heart. A dental patient said he had to wait six months for a checkup. Prostate-cancer patients wait 120 days on average for surgery, but in one county the wait was as high as 217 days. Patients wait four hours on average to be seen in the emergency rooms of Stockholm's major hospitals.



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When patients do get to see doctors, they “complain about not being able to see their own regular general practitioner — and the ensuing lack of continuity — as a growing number of doctors and nurses are temporary hires employed by staffing companies,” notes AFP. Official numbers — which may understate the problem — suggest that 80 percent of the healthcare system is short of nurses.

Some hospitals are closing, while even new ones aren’t able to keep up with demand, reports AFP:

In Sollefteå, the premier’s northern hometown with nearly 20,000 residents, the only maternity ward was shut down last year to save money.

With the closest maternity ward now 200 kilometers (125 miles) away, midwives offer parents-to-be classes on how to deliver babies in cars — which some have since done....

Frustrations peaked this year when it emerged that the bill for Stockholm’s over-budget state-of-the-art New Karolinska Hospital would tick in at 61.4 billion kronor (5.8 billion euros, \$6.7 billion) — the most expensive hospital in the world.

And yet patients have had to be transferred to other overcrowded hospitals because some of the facilities are unusable.

Add to that the aging population and the recent influx of immigrants, and the cracks in the socialist edifice are becoming impossible to ignore, much to the chagrin of Sweden’s leftists. Lisa Pelling, chief analyst at progressive think tank Arena Ide, told AFP that Swedes’ lack of confidence in politicians’ ability to solve the healthcare system’s problems creates “a risk their faith in the welfare state will be eroded.”

Of course, governing parties, rather than admit socialism’s failure, are simply trying their same old tactics. The Social Democrats, who currently control the government, are promising to fix the system by spending even more money on it. Their main opponents, the Moderates, want to patch the system their own way by rewarding counties for reducing queues, a mandate that “critics say ... just encourages doctors to prioritize easily-solved cases,” observes AFP.

There is only one sure way to fix the healthcare system in [Sweden](#) or any other country: Get the government out of the way and let the free market reign.

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