

PRESS RELEASE FROM UK2020

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Rethink failing NHS, says former Cabinet minister Owen Paterson

- UK lags far behind comparable countries in health outcomes
- 46,000 die each year unnecessarily due to NHS failure to match best international outcomes
- Former Cabinet minister Owen Paterson says figures “shocking” and issues call for urgent Government inquiry
- New report finds UK worst place in Western Europe to have a baby with three times more preventable deaths than Greece
- But majority of public believes NHS best in the world for results

Former Cabinet minister Owen Paterson will tonight (Monday) condemn the “political-media consensus” over the NHS in the wake of new research showing that it lags far behind comparable countries in health outcomes.

He will call on the Government to commission an urgent inquiry into why the NHS performs so poorly on international comparisons and question whether “a centralised state-run monopoly of healthcare is the best and only way to run a universal healthcare system that is fair.”

Mr Paterson will speak out as a report commissioned by UK2020, the think-tank he founded, reveals that annual avoidable deaths from common serious diseases, such as breast and prostate cancer and stroke, are about 46,000 higher in the UK than if we performed as well as the countries with the best health outcomes.

The UK is also shown to be the worst place in Western Europe to be pregnant and have a baby. While six countries including Spain, Italy and Belgium manage to keep the number of preventable deaths at zero, the UK has over three times the number of preventable deaths than Greece at 25 per 1,000 births.

The findings come alongside a new YouGov poll of more than 3,600 people which finds that 44 per cent of people believe the NHS delivers the best outcomes in the world while 36 per cent do not and 20 per cent don't know.

In a speech tonight in central London, Mr Paterson will say: “It is clear that possibly the most unquestioned consensus in politics today concerns the National Health Service. It is an area of public policy that, like no other, a politician dare not touch.

“The NHS towers above all else as the one common cultural unifier that we hold onto. To take a critical tone toward the NHS is considered almost unpatriotic.

“We simply do not have the best healthcare system in the world and the sooner we debunk the myth... the sooner we can square up to the reality and start improving our healthcare system.

He will say: “It is time to break up the national consensus that blindly reveres the NHS, ignores the outcomes, and to open up the healthcare debate to empirical and international evidence. Until we do, thousands of our fellow citizens will continue to die prematurely.”

Setting the bar lower and comparing the UK’s outcomes with the twelfth best performing countries also shows the NHS outcomes in a dim light. Avoidable deaths are 17,000 a year higher than those for countries in this category, depending on the precise illness involved. Denmark, for instance, is only a middling performer in international health league tables but it still has some 6,000 fewer avoidable deaths a year than the UK, according to an indicator called ‘Mortality Amenable to Healthcare’.

The report finds that while important, spending cannot be the sole reason for the UK's poor performance. This report shows that there are countries who spend less than or close to what the UK does on health care as a percentage of GDP who go on to perform better in certain conditions: Australia, Finland and Israel.

The report, *The UK Health System – An International Comparison of Health Outcomes*, draws on official data from across the world to compare the health outcomes of the NHS with those of leading developed countries. It marks the UK alongside other countries for a variety of the most common cancers: breast, bowel, cervical, lung, prostate, leukaemia, ovarian, stomach, liver, skin, oral, laryngeal, gallbladder, and lymphoma (Non-Hodgkin). Comparisons are also made for ischaemic and haemorrhagic stroke.

For instance, Sweden does best in treating breast cancer and if the UK performed to Swedish standards, it would save 4,242 lives a year. South Korea comes top for bowel cancer and the gap is 6,195 lives a year. The discrepancies are smaller when the UK is compared with the country ranked twelfth for any particular condition, but 2,606 lives would be saved here if the NHS did as well as Sweden, the twelfth placed country for dealing with prostate cancer.

Dr Kristian Niemi of the Institute of Economic Affairs is the principal author of the report, which has been overseen by an editorial board, including renowned cancer specialist Dr Karol Sikora and Dr Fiona Payne of King Edward VII’s Hospital and a practising NHS GP.

Dr Karol Sikora commented: “The cancer data in this report are stark. Study after study over the last 30 years has shown that we are still at the bottom of the league when it comes to cancer survival. Despite much effort to improve services this report clearly shows how far we still lag behind in the statistic that matters most – preventable deaths from common cancers.

“Cancer survival provides an excellent litmus test for any healthcare system. It's not just the treatment but the whole pathway from first symptom, to primary care and then the investigations to make the diagnosis that reflect the system's quality. There is huge variation in access and speed of this pathway in the UK with serial delays and blind alleys for many. Creating a uniform fast track for all patients with persistent symptoms is the only way to expedite treatment and improve our appalling results.

“A network of easily accessible diagnostic centres with blood tests, scanners and biopsy systems operating a 48 hour turnaround is the only way to ensure we capture cancer in its early stages.

“We all love the concept of the NHS but it's simply not adequate for dealing with the epidemic of chronic disease that is inevitable with an ageing population. A radical shake-up, not just an increase in funding, is needed if we are to catch up with other European countries in the next decade.

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Comparison between UK and best country for cancer treatment					
Condition	UK rank	UK mortality rate*	Best Country Mortality rate	Best Country	Difference in lives lost
Breast Cancer	23/28	18.9%	10.6%	Sweden	4,242
Lung Cancer	30/32	90.4%	69.9%	Japan	9,120
Prostate Cancer	23/32	16.8%	2.8%	US	6,081
Bowel Cancer	24/27	43.9%	29.1%	Korea	6,195
Skin Cancer	11/24**	14.6%	9.6%	Switzerland	679
Lymphoma non Hodgkin	16/24**	43.3%	25.9%	Iceland	2,243
Leukaemia	20/32	52.6%	40.6%	Belgium	1,038
Oral Cancer	6/20**	48.5%	39.1%	Malta	688
Ovarian Cancer	25/32	63.6%	55.1%	Finland	597
Stomach Cancer	29/32	81.5%	42.1%	Korea	2,752
Liver Cancer	24/32	90.7%	73%	Japan	833
Cervical Cancer	24/28	40.5%	18.8%	Norway	661
Laryngeal	6/17**	38%	22.5%	Iceland	360
Gallbladder	3/18**	81.4%	74.2%	Belgium	65

Comparison between UK and 12th best country for cancer treatment					
Condition	UK rank	UK mortality rate*	12th Best Mortality Rate	12th Best Country	Difference in lives lost
Breast Cancer	23/28	18.9%	14%	Belgium	2,504
Lung Cancer	30/32	90.4%	85%	Iceland & Australia	2,402
Prostate Cancer	23/32	16.8%	10.8%	Sweden	2,606
Bowel Cancer	24/27	43.9%	36.1%	Netherlands	3,265
Skin Cancer	11/24**	14.6%	14.7%	Finland	-4
Lymphoma non Hodgkin	16/24**	43.3%	39.6%	Spain	441
Leukaemia	20/32	52.6%	46.4%	Norway	536
Oral Cancer	6/20**	48.5%	53.8%	Belgium	-388
Ovarian Cancer	25/32	63.6%	61%	France	183
Stomach Cancer	29/32	81.5%	72.1%	Australia	657
Liver Cancer	24/32	90.7%	85.6%	France	240
Cervical Cancer	24/28	40.5%	34%	Canada	198
Laryngeal	6/17**	38%	40.2%	Spain	-50
Gallbladder	3/18**	81.4%	84.8%	Netherlands	-30

*The percentage of patients who die within five years

** England only

Notes to Editors

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UK2020 is an independent think tank launched by Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP in October 2014 to produce a conservative policy platform for 2020 onwards.

It works with academics, practitioners and independent researchers to develop robust, common sense and optimistic policies.

www.uk2020.org.uk/