



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on January 19, 2017

British Drug Rationing a Bitter Pill to Swallow

Need a new drug to treat a serious health condition? If you live in Great Britain, you may be out of luck. Under a new policy set to take effect in April, that nation's single-payer healthcare agency will begin rationing new drugs that bureaucrats deem too expensive, a move that could affect a fifth of all new drugs and the thousands of patients who need them.



According to the [Times](#) of London, under current policy, most new drugs are made available to National Health Service (NHS) patients if the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) approves them. Under the new policy, however, the NHS “will be able to delay making [approved drugs] available or restrict who is eligible for treatment if the total cost to the health service is more than” about \$25 million per year. “Analysis by NICE and the pharmaceutical industry shows that 20 per cent of newly approved drugs — expected to number about 12 a year — will fall into that category.”

Richard Torbett of the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry told the *Times* that “many patients could face delays of up to four years in getting common medicines.”

“Almost anything that’s in primary care — diabetes medicines, respiratory medicines, if there is anything for Alzheimer’s disease — would have a large number of patients even if the price is very low and it would trigger this new process,” he said.

Given that many of the drugs threatened by the new policy treat such life-threatening ailments as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, rationing them is tantamount to signing a death warrant for patients who need them. Drugs that treat rare conditions are almost always expensive and will most likely be withheld.

Philip Anderson of Prostate Cancer UK told the *Times* that the new policy could be “catastrophic” and “has the potential to throw the brakes on the most effective new treatments and technologies just before they get to patients.”

According to the paper:

Drug companies say that they will no longer launch drugs early in Britain if bureaucrats are given power to stop them from reaching patients for purely financial reasons. Campaigners warned that the plans would put Britain further behind the rest of Europe in offering cutting-edge therapies and



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more people would die while waiting for medicines.

The reason for the rationing is simple: As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher so astutely observed, socialists “always run out of other people’s money.” The NHS, as a prime example of socialism, is, as the *Times* put it, “under exceptional pressure” to curtail spending because people invariably consume more of a seemingly free good or service than of one they have to pay for out of pocket, which drives up the cost to those footing the bill, in this case taxpayers. Indeed, NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens told Parliament last week that are “clearly substantial funding pressures” on his agency.

Those “funding pressures” have been [taking their toll](#) on NHS patients for [quite some time](#). Last year, in an effort to control costs, the NHS began rationing new drugs that can cure Hepatitis C. In addition, the [BBC](#) reports that “record numbers of patients” are “facing long waits” in emergency rooms, with nearly one-fifth of ER patients waiting more than four hours and others being discharged prematurely to make room for new patients.

The NHS says that it must ration new drugs because they are too expensive. Those restricted under the new policy would cost nearly \$500 million a year, while new drugs that continue to be made available will cost about \$150 million. The service also argues that rationing drugs will prevent it from having to ration other services. A patient with prostate cancer who is denied treatment because the drugs cost too much is, however, unlikely to be comforted by the fact that by doing this, the NHS is still able to, e.g., provide obstetric services to others.

One big motivation for beginning the rationing program is the fear that the NHS could be on the hook for “billions of pounds” if a “breakthrough dementia drug emerged,” pens the *Times*. George McNamara of the Alzheimer’s Society told the newspaper the new policy was a “short-sighted attempt to patch up a system that’s hemorrhaging cash” by “cutting away the future hopes of people with dementia when they are most in need.”

There is, unfortunately, no way to “patch up” a socialist system, at least not for the long term. All such systems eventually end up “hemorrhaging cash” and rationing services because the pool of available taxpayer funds is limited while demand for services is limitless. The only real solution to the NHS’s woes is to abolish it and let the free market deliver healthcare to Britons in the same way it delivers beans, brollies, and bowlers.



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