Who is the Winner: The Comparison between UK and US Health Care System

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Abstract. Every country’s health care system is a unique reflection of its history, politics, and culture, which means that every country’s health care system is different. This essay mainly describes the background of UK and US health care system and make a comparison between those two, trying to discuss which one is the better one.

The Development History of UK Health Care System

UK is the earliest country to build health care system, back in 1601, which is called Elizabethan Poor Laws originated from England and Wales[1]. In 1834, The New Poor Law was passed by the government of Lord Melbourne[2]. The mainly difference between the New Poor Laws and Poor Laws is aiding method transferring from indoor relief to outdoor relief. Based on these two acts passed, the UK health care system started to developing. The aid described in the Poor Laws mainly supported by parish churches, there were over 15,000 parishes all over the country[3]. There were other organizations providing support to the poor ones, such as Unions and charity groups. However, due to the restrictions of politics and economics, efficiency of aiding was not desirable.

In 1911, National Insurance Act passed, it was one of the beginning of modern welfare state. The Beveridge Report[4], also known as Social Insurance and Allied Services, published in 1942. Based on the Report, UK government passed National Health Service Act back in 1946, it built the structure of the National Health Services in UK, which symbolized the poor had the right to enjoy medical aid. In 1970s, Labour Party and Conservative Party focused on the elder, disability and children. In 1976, the Labour Party government published a white paper, it illustrates that health care and community service should be priority to citizens. Three years later, the Conservative Party had the same policy as Labour Party government, in 1989, two white papers Working for Patients and Caring for People were produced, it is regarded as the most important reform of UK’s over 40 years’ health care policy, it is proposed to reduce financial stress of the government, enhance medical efficiency and ensure medical resource is open for all citizen. That is the founding and development of UK’s health care system, also known as NHS.

The Development History of US Health Care System

The beginning of US health care system was during the 1930s, the US was facing the Great Depression, many people lost their jobs, no food no clothes, especially hard to support medical treatment. In 1935, American Medical Association did survey on people’s health condition and trying to provide better medical service to public citizen and added it to the bill, however Roosevelt rejected it no reason. In the late 1950s, the medical expenses on the old increasing more and more, lots of people asked for investing more on the old’s medical treatment. Kerr-Mills Act got passed by Parliament in 1960, which means the Federal Government offers aid to State Government, low-wage citizen including the old and disability ones could reach more help from State Government.

Two breaking-ice public health project, Medicare and Medicaid[5], established in 1965, were the result of US health care system reform. From 1970s to 1980s, the coverage provided to public increasing from 5.3 billion dollars to 24.8 billion dollars. Every President such as Barak Obama
made huge progress on public health care, he signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act on March 23, 2010\textsuperscript{[6]}. Maybe the unstopping reform of US health care system makes the medical level of US spectacular.

**The Similarity and Difference between UK and US Health Care System**

Both countries spend a lot on public health service. In 2014, UK health care spending was 179 billion pound which was 9.9\% of that year’s GDP, however, the US spent 16.6\% of GDP. The table below shows the comparison between OECD countries health care spending per GDP.

![Health care spending percentage GDP between OECD countries](image)

Both countries focus on public health care, they regard receiving medical service is the basic civil right. Just as the beginning of every country’s health care system is a unique reflection of its history, politics, and culture, the two countries, UK and US have made huge effort and reform of their own health care system, we cannot deny that both countries have the high standard public health service, that is what they have earned for.

However, there are some major difference between these two countries health care system. Firstly, we all know that the NHS in UK basically provide all of the medical treatment for public, so it is completely free. However, since President Gerald Ford’s call for health reform in 1974, you will cost a lot if you don’t have a health insurance. Last but not least, the NHS mainly gets support from government budget, but Federal Government and State Government support US health care system. Although, US invests much more on health care, the result is not better than UK, the life expectancy of US at birth and health care expenditure per person is much lower than UK’s, details shown below diagram\textsuperscript{1}.

![Health spending per capita and life expectancy at birth between UK and US](image)

Table 1. Health spending per capita and life expectancy at birth between UK and US.

(X-axis represents Health Spending Per Capita, Y-axis represents Life Expectancy at Birth. Source: UK Health Accounts: 2014)
Conclusion

“I’ve not had to do anything but turn up to my NHS appointments on time and take my pills regularly. The support is incredible” said Henry. “In the US, 70% of MS patients report some difficulty paying for healthcare and 16.4% report a lot of difficulty”. Maybe it is hard to decide who is the winner, but reduce the burden for public is the better one, right?

References