Indicating Fields of Inequalities Regarding the Access to Health Benefits: Activity of the Watch Health Care Foundation

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ABSTRACT
Restrictions to health services in Poland have been an inspiration to establish Watch Health Care Foundation (WHC). The fundamental disease of the system is namely the disproportion between the amount of the funds and the contents of the package. It causes everywhere the same ‘symptoms’ and leads to the same pathological phenomena: queues and other forms of rationing (‘guaranteed’) health benefits, corruption, making use of privileges. Foundation uses the potential of information society and available infrastructure (web portal http://www.watchhealthcare.eu) and all activities are presented on the website with the aim of influencing the health care system. On the basis of reports of limited access to health services, a ranking is created at WHC web portal, which aims to show what the biggest gaps in access to health services are - this is the way of showing the patient and health care system needs and also one possible approach of continuous education of the health care services consumers targeted at health care systems improvement.

Keywords: Basic Benefit Package, Health Care Information, Health Care Restrictions, Health Care System, Limited Access, Public Health Insurance System, Watch Health Care

INTRODUCTION
The word empowerment has been broadly defined as an enabling process through which individuals or communities take control of their lives and their environment (Berger, Anderson-Hatper, & Kavookjian, 2002). Empowerment could be also described as a “social process of recognizing, promoting, and enhancing people’s abilities to meet their own needs, solve their own problems, and mobilize necessary resources to take control of their own lives” (Jones & Mel- eis, 1993). The key elements of empowerment are knowledge, behavioural skills, and self-responsibility. It is assumed that the access to information and appropriate ongoing education is a basic mechanism for patient empowerment (Monteagudo & Moreno, 2007). This access to
information and the ability to interpret correctly the information available increase the control that patients can experience in their health care. The challenge is not only to improve patient access to information about their health but also to provide them with information about restrictions in health care services. In Poland the Watch Health Care Foundation (WHC) has undertaken the challenge. The mission of the Foundation is to provide trustworthy information regarding those benefits and medical procedures to which patients can expect limited access.

This paper presents the idea to establish Watch Health Care Foundation (restrictions to health services in Poland) and describes its activities. Foundation uses the potential of the Internet and all activities are presented on website www.watchhealthcare.eu. Watch Health Care Foundation wants to show the patient and whole health care system needs. The aim of these activities is to improve healthcare system performance and to enhance patients’ awareness.

The inspiration for establishing the Foundation - fundamental disease of the health care system in Poland

The need of ‘introducing a guaranteed benefits package’ has been postulated repeatedly until 2009 in Poland, on the occasion of all subsequent parliamentary and presidential elections. Creating the package de novo was to be the panacea that would heal the health system of all woes. What was misunderstood was the concept that Poland has long had a functioning package, ever since the introduction of a universal health security system - the question was what that package was like. Any country that introduces a health insurance system or a health security system must almost automatically determine what the insured are entitled to or possibly what they are not entitled to, in order to collect funds for this purpose (Władysiuk-Blicharz, Łanda, Nadzieja, Gąsiorowski, & Dziadyk, 2006). Thanks to the so-called Benefit Package Act, which was prepared by the Ministry of Health and signed by the President of the Republic of Poland, discussions about the need to create a guaranteed services package in Poland were once and for all terminated. This allows the social dialogue to finally move forward. There will be no more futile discussions about the need to create a package and a constructive debate about the form of the guaranteed services package, improving the functionality and rules of creating its individual parts will begin, as well as the package’s role for the development of additional insurances in Poland.

In accordance with the Benefits Package Act in Poland, the content of particular parts of the guaranteed benefits package is determined by the Minister of Health by way of appropriate regulations. These regulations regard, i.e., therapeutic health programmes, outpatient specialist care, primary health care, inpatient care, lists of reimbursed medicines, the highly specialized benefits, mandatory vaccinations, etc.

The inspiration for establishing the Foundation came from fundamental disease of the system namely the disproportion between the amount of the funds and the contents of the package. The society however does not feel the disease itself, but the symptoms that lead to numerous and serious consequences. Limitations to access to ‘guaranteed’ benefits, regardless of the nature of those limitations, affect usually the weakest. They lead to shifting the costs of diagnosing and treatment to family budgets, health deterioration of the society, even given to the fact that many people will not use health care at all and the growth of pathological phenomena in the doctor-patient relationship, such as bribery and making use of ‘connections’. Indebtedness
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