

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE NHS

The vast majority of healthcare in the UK is provided by the NHS. In 2007/8, it is estimated to receive £104billion, or approximately £1300 per person.

National Insurance contributions amount to around 17% of tax receipts (in 2006-7 some £90billion) but are no longer a hypothecated tax directly applied to the NHS. Unless exempt, all those in work pay National Insurance.

The cost of operations varies from Trust to Trust. For example a hip replacement may cost from £2000 to £8000 with an average cost of approximately £4300. An appendectomy varies from £468 to £2108, with an average of £1114. Cataract operations vary from £337 to £1659 with an average cost of £699. The cost of care in a primary (GP) setting is roughly one third of the same care in a secondary (hospital) setting.

Co-Payments – in healthcare systems which are insurance based, the concept of co-payments (aka deductibles, excess) are designed to reduce demand by introducing the ‘moral hazard’/personal responsibility approach. It should be noted that where charges in the NHS are made (e.g. prescriptions), they are not done for the ‘moral hazard’ reason, but to generate further income.

Vouchers – exchanged for healthcare services from a provider of the patient’s choosing up to a specified value.

The structures described below apply only to England, following devolution. For details of the NHS in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey go to the following:

Scotland - www.show.scot.nhs.uk

Wales – www.wales.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland – www.n-i.nhs.uk

Isle of Man – www.gov.im/dhss/health

States of Guernsey – www.gov.gg/ccm/portal

States of Jersey – www.gov.je/HealthWell

Please check with the relevant organisation whether or not its remit extends to the UK country in which you receive your NHS.

In addition to the information elsewhere on our site, you may wish to go to the following sites

PCTs – Primary Care Trusts buy/“commission” acute services from NHS Trusts and from the private healthcare sector. They also oversee the work of GPs and dentists in their areas as well as providing some primary care direct to patients. They control 80% of the total NHS budget.

Other NHS Trusts – these include hospital, ambulance, care and mental health trusts.

Strategic Health Authorities are responsible to the Department of Health for the supervision of the NHS in their (10) areas.

Special Health Authorities include

NHS Direct – www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk – telephone and online clinical advice

NICE – The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence – providing national guidance to the NHS in England in the fields of

- public health and the prevention of ill health
- health technologies – new and existing medicines, medical devices, treatment and procedures
- clinical practice – appropriate treatment of patients with specific diseases or conditions

www.nice.org.uk

National Patient Safety Agency – responsible for promoting patient safety in the NHS. It works to identify risk and recommend risk reduction based on best practice. Staff are encouraged to report incidents or near misses. After analysis and assessment recommendations are made to the NHS for use as good practice.

The NPSA also includes the National Clinical Assessment Service, the National Research Ethics Service, and commissions National Confidential Enquiries

www.npsa.nhs.uk

Healthcare Commission – inspects health services from patients’ perspective to standards defined by Department of Health, audits healthcare value for money from taxpayers’ perspective, investigates complaints which have not been resolved locally at first stage, publishes ratings of NHS trusts and an annual report on the NHS in England and Wales.

www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

For a fuller history of the NHS, see www.nhshistory.net. A brief history of the NHS and the current structure can be found www.nhs.uk, see ‘About the NHS and Authorities & Trusts’ at bottom of site’s home page.