A chilling glimpse of life without the NHS – and even more reasons to save it
An Irish snapshot September 2014

I've just returned from a holiday in the west of Ireland. I knew that the crash and the EU bail out in 2009 had been very serious, with serious effects on the economy. I'd expected tales of unemployment, and town centres with more than their fair share of charity shops.

What I hadn't expected was the every day nightmare of privatised health. Everyone we talked to – and that was a lot of people, men and women, young and old – had stories to tell about the current cost of illness.

Five years on, it is treated as an everyday, unavoidable calamity that it costs 60 euros to visit a doctor's surgery, 2,200 euros for a minor day 'oscopy', 30 euros plus for a prescription. It is now normal to think twice before going to the GP with a child illness, and more than twice about exploring some chronic, grumbling condition of your own.

You can opt for insurance, at 2,000 euros a year minimum but, like as not, it doesn't cover everything even when you try to claim it back, as the man found who'd had the day 'oscopy' when he came to claim the money back. They only gave him 1,500 euros, leaving him 700 euros to fund from his own pocket – and they automatically increased his insurance premium.

The most chilling thing of all, in the stories of families facing unaffordable bills for healthcare, was the acceptance that this was unavoidable, just part of life in austerity.

The very poor, and those on state benefits, get GP visits and hospital admission for free, but there is a growing two tier health service divide as the government cuts back on what it offers the professionals for treating those without means by 40 per cent. In poorer areas, GPs are reporting they have to emigrate; one said he was forced to rely on his private, insured patients for an income and they were increasingly hard to find *any of these*.

Even more reasons to save our own system!

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