Hidden Costs of Waiting for Treatment:
The Case of Orthopedic Surgery in Norway

a discussion with

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Kelvin Smith Library Rooms LL06A-C, 11201 Euclid Ave

One of the standard criticisms of health care systems with universal coverage is that they lead to "waiting lists." There are various mechanisms, but the most common idea is that someone is in charge of limiting costs (unlike in the U.S.); that leads to some limits on capacity, and when demand exceeds supply, people have to wait.

This criticism is often overstated, and usually ignores the waits created in the United States by not having insurance. Nevertheless waiting lists, especially for "elective" procedures such as joint replacements, are a major issue in many countries, and the controversies reveal something interesting about health care politics: that "experts" and citizens have quite different views.

System managers and expert analysts often argue that faster service would be a convenience for patients, but is not worth the extra expense. In the case of elective surgery, for example, some waits will have little or no effect on patients' long-term outcomes, so extra spending is unnecessary. At most, the lists need to be prioritized better, to avoid the exceptions.

Voters, however, tend not to agree with the experts.

No system can provide everything anyone could want, immediately; that would require huge and expensive extra capacity. One of the core questions for health policy analysis, then, is the effects of delayed access to services. The answer must depend on the delays and the services. Yet careful research on one case can help us understand the factors in any other. Professor Votruba has some fascinating research results on such a case, which should spark good discussion.

The Friday Public Affairs Discussion Lunch is an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, emeriti and other members of our communities to learn and question each other about public policy issues at the international, national, and local levels. Faculty and other speakers share their research and experience to get beyond the headlines and repetition in the mass media, and the wild rumors of the internet. Lunch is brown bag, but cookies and some beverages are provided by the Center for Policy Studies of the College of Arts and Sciences.

http://fridaylunch.case.edu/