

The bedrock of the NHS was to create an equal health service for all, but today, it seems that if you live in Scotland, you're quite a bit more equal than others...

**It's Not Fair**

# The Health Divide

By Sarah Purcell

If you are English, elderly and in need of personal care, or paying for prescriptions for a chronic condition, or in need of the best new drugs for Alzheimer's, lung cancer, a brain tumour or macular disease, you are going to be disappointed. Yet if you live in Scotland, you'll be entitled to all of these free, courtesy of the NHS.

This situation has arisen because devolution has allowed the Scots – and the Welsh – to decide how they spend their proportion of NHS funding.

On top of this, the Scots have the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) to decide on which drugs to make available free, whereas England gets its rulings from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). They do not always arrive at the same conclusion, and NICE can take a lot longer to reach one.

But according to Matthew Elliott from the Tax Payer's Alliance, although the Scots pay the same taxes as the English,

the playing field isn't level: "The Scots get £1,500 more government funding per head than we do in England and this enables the Scottish Executive to pay for free care for the elderly and abolish prescription charges, as well as offering free services such as NHS dental care and eye tests," he says.

The inequality brought about by drugs availability is particularly acute. It's thought that around 5,000 patients a year could benefit from the lung cancer drug Tarceva which is approved in Scotland, but branded too expensive by NICE.

"The decision by NICE to reject this drug was disgraceful," says Mike Unger at the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation. "The drug has been approved in the rest of Europe. Economics was the only reason NICE rejected it. The average life expectancy for lung cancer is just four to five months, and Tarceva can extend this by 50 per cent – how can you put a price on that?"

The drugs Macugen and Lucentis were both quickly approved for use by the Scottish

## WELCOME TO...

- ✓ FREE dental check-ups
- ✓ FREE eyesight check-ups
- ✓ FREE long-term care for everyone
- ✓ FREE prescriptions (soon)
- ✓ The latest drug for lung cancer
- ✓ The latest drug for macular eye disease
- ✓ The latest drug for Alzheimer's



## SMC and NICE do not always arrive at the same conclusion

Medical Commission in Scotland, but not in England: "We find it amazing that the Scottish Medical Council can evaluate a drug in 18 weeks, while it takes NICE 18 months to do the same job," says Tom Bembridge of the Macular Disease Society.

And long-term care is means-tested in England, but not in Scotland: "In Scotland, if you live in your own home you won't have to contribute to any care you need, while those in care homes get a substantial proportion of the costs funded by the NHS," says Andrew Chidgey at the Alzheimer's Society.

Sick, elderly and infirm in England? Move to Scotland!

### CASES MAKING THE POINT

● **Macular eye disease**

**ENGLAND** Nora Morgan (72) from Kislingbury, Northampton, has wet age-related macular degeneration and could benefit from the new drug Lucentis:

"I haven't totally lost my sight in my right eye yet but my vision is very distorted. I've been told I could benefit from Lucentis but my Primary Care Trust has turned me down because my other eye is still okay. They say the vision in my right eye is now too bad for the drug to help. Lucentis injections would cost me at least £10,000 – I don't have that kind of money."

**SCOTLAND** Thomas Scott (83) a retired architect from Glasgow, also has wet age-related macular degeneration:

"I have AMD in my right eye. I did pay for the injections before they'd been approved by the NHS in Scotland. I do a lot of painting and I really didn't want to lose my sight. At the moment my left eye is okay, but I've now been told that when I do need the Lucentis injections I'll get them free."

● **Alzheimer's**

**ENGLAND** Beryl Beaver (75) from Southport, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in May:

"They grade you on a points system when Alzheimer's is diagnosed, with 30 being the mildest and 0 the severest case. I'm in the early stages and was graded 27. Aricept isn't funded on the NHS unless you fall between 10 and 20 on the scale – below 10 and it's not thought to be worthwhile either."

**SCOTLAND** Lynda Hogg (53) from Edinburgh, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's two years ago and is prescribed Aricept on the NHS:

"I was suffering with memory problems and extreme tiredness and was given Aricept even before I was diagnosed with the condition, as a precaution. A scan confirmed the diagnosis and I've taken it ever since. The drug has helped me enormously."

● **Prescriptions**

**ENGLAND** The Department of Health told us: "We have no plans to abolish prescription charges. Some 87 per cent of prescriptions are dispensed free. Prescription charges provide a valuable contribution to the NHS in England, worth £430m last year. Abolishing them would significantly reduce the money available to deliver other health priorities."

**SCOTLAND** From 2008, people with chronic conditions such as asthma won't have to pay for prescriptions, with the benefit extended to all within four years. Free prescriptions in Scotland will cost £50m and the money will come from the annual grant made to the Scottish parliament by Westminster.

**'We have no plans to abolish prescription charges'** Dept of Health

**Long-term care is means-tested in England, but not in Scotland**