Today’s EU measurement:

Weak patient position, unequal healthcare in Ireland

(Brussels, May 15, 2012)

Ireland stands out as a grey spot in patient rights and information when the 2012 Euro Health Consumer Index (EHCI) was presented today in the European Parliament in Brussels. The comparison gave the Netherlands 872 out of potentially 1,000 points, followed by Denmark (822), Iceland (799), Luxembourg (791) and Belgium (783). Ireland scored 714 points, finishing 13th out of 34 countries (no rank change compared to the 2009 EHCI), just behind UK but ahead of Germany. The EHCI has been published since 2005 by the Sweden-based think-tank Health Consumer Powerhouse (HCP).

What explains the Irish rank?

- Since 2009 there has been a general improvement of healthcare performance in Europe, and Ireland seems to be keeping up, finds Dr Arne Bjornberg, HCP COO and head of the EHCI 2012 team. Remarkable for Ireland is that patients still are in a weak position with regard to rights and information. Here Ireland is at par with countries such as Latvia or Serbia, while UK patients are among the most empowered in Europe!

- Irish healthcare is difficult to score because of the 40% having additional private insurance; should that be regarded as just another technical solution for progressive taxation, or is it an indication of underperformance by the public healthcare system?

General improvement – with warning signs

The EHCI reflects a continuous improvement of European healthcare, with better outcomes and overall conditions. Alarm signals concerning the impact from the economic downturns seem a bit exaggerated. For decades healthcare has talked of budget cuts and loss of quality when in reality the opposite development has been more correct. But the Index points to three distinct areas of special concern in the wake of the crisis:

- Tendencies of longer waiting for expensive surgery among countries most affected by the economic downturn

- Increased share of out of pocket payment for a range of treatments

- Lack of improvement and even deteriorating access to new kinds of medicines.

Regardless of the economy Europe remains hospital infection territory. For every second among the 34 measured countries EHCI puts a red alert for the risk of infections.

- An EU initiative to enforce the ban on sales of antibiotics without a prescription would bring this figure down, claims Mr Johan Hjertqvist, HCP founder and president. This would mean more to patient safety than most other things EU engages in!
About the Index

The EHCI has become a measurement standard for European healthcare. The 2012 edition ranks 34 national European health care systems across 42 indicators, covering five areas that are key to the health consumer: Patients' rights and information, Waiting times for treatment, Outcomes, Prevention/Range and reach of services provided and Pharmaceuticals. The Index is compiled from a combination of public statistics, patient polls and independent research conducted by the founder, the Sweden-based think tank Health Consumer Powerhouse.

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For more information and the explanatory report:
www.healthpowerhouse.com/ehci2012

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