A Comparison of the Danish and the South Korean Health Care System

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Dear Sir,

When we were home in Denmark we didn't know what to expect about the South Korean health system. First of all, not only because we didn't know much about South Korea in general but also we were just starting to learn about the Danish system. We imagined it would not be much different from what we knew about the Danish system as we heard that a great deal of Republic of Korea resembled Denmark. So I was excited that having a direct opportunity to experience the South Korean culture and health care system other than Denmark.¹

The Danish people have always been very proud of the Danish health system. Even in the early years of the Danish history the country was known for its long living people. The Danish health system is very well structured and it is based on the idea of giving every citizen the opportunity of free health care. About 15.5% of the economic support of the Danish health system is paid by the citizens through general taxes – therefore the Danish taxes are quite high compared to other European countries but the Danish citizens are then able to have medical treatment, operations and medicine for free at any time. In Denmark, we divide our health care system into two groups, the primary health care system and the secondary health care system. The primary system include the general practitioner, the pharmacies, the

dentists, the nursing homes for elderly people or disable, and the home based care of elderly people or newborns. The secondary system is the hospitals, as well as the specialized clinics. To use the secondary system, you would need a referral slip from the general practitioner, but there are some specialties that you are allowed to use without the referral slip – for example the otho-rhino-laryngologie. You can also go to the hospital in case of emergency or childbirth without the slip. In the primary system you are connected to one doctor (one general practitioner), who works at a private clinic. The government pays the doctor and the clinic an arranged amount of money for each consultation they proceed. The only thing you have to pay for yourself are the dentists. In the secondary system you can choose freely among the hospitals in Denmark. Most of the hospitals in Denmark are public so you don't need to pay for the treatment, the admission or even the surgeries if needed. There are private hospitals as well in Denmark, but they are not used that often for illness. Typically only if the waiting list is too long for an operation or the patient wants a special treatment. Most of the patients at the private hospitals are there for cosmetic reasons, why plastic surgeries are big here. The primary system handles the smaller and more common illnesses, where the secondary system is for longer and more serious illnesses. In many

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ways the Korean health care system is quite similar to the Danish. The Korean health insurance system gives the same amount of medical expenses for all citizens which also provides every citizen an opportunity of medical treatment.² The way a Korean can go to a medical practitioner and have a referral slip is similar to the Danish system. In that way I think it is easy to compare the Danish and the Korean health care system – the only big difference is how the health care system in the two countries is financed.

We believe that the Danish and Korean medical technology is well developed and that doctors of both countries use the newest technology such as laparoscopy and robot operation methods. The fact that both countries are equally equipped in the terms of medical technology makes it very interesting to have an exchange of knowledge between the two countries; especially because Denmark and Korea will be fighting much of the same diseases such as hypertension, chronic diseases and cancer due to life-style diseases.³

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Conflict of Interest

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