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## Prywatyzacja opieki medycznej w Polsce w opinii pacjentów

## Privatization of medical care according to the public opinion in Poland

### Streszczenie

Celem pracy była analiza opinii społecznej, dotyczącej wpływu prywatyzacji jednostek opieki zdrowotnej na funkcjonowanie systemu ochrony zdrowia w Polsce.

Badanie przeprowadzono w styczniu 2008 roku wśród różnych grup społecznych z pięciu województw: mazowieckiego, zachodniopomorskiego, śląskiego, lubuskiego i lubelskiego. Badania miały charakter anonimowy. Narzędziem badawczym był autorski kwestionariusz ankiety, opracowany na potrzeby niniejszego badania. Wysłano 1200 kwestionariuszy, otrzymano 740 prawidłowo wypełnionych ankiet. Wyniki badań poddano analizie statystycznej.

Przez prywatyzację ochrony zdrowia większość badanych rozumie zmianę formy organizacyjno-prawnej funkcjonowania jednostki opieki zdrowotnej (41,5%) lub sprzedaż szpitali prywatnym inwestorom (34,6%). Około 40% badanych uważa, że prywatyzacja opieki zdrowotnej ograniczy dostęp do świadczeń medycznych. Około 48% jest zdania, że prywatyzacja usprawni funkcjonowanie całego systemu ochrony zdrowia w Polsce. Opinie badanych różnicuje dochód, wykształcenie oraz stan zdrowia.

Można stwierdzić, że nie ma zgodnej opinii społecznej dotyczącej prywatyzacji jednostek opieki zdrowotnej w Polsce, różnie też jest postrzegane znaczenie procesu prywatyzacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** prywatyzacja, ochrona zdrowia, dostęp do usług medycznych.

### Summary

The aim of the research was to analyze public opinion on how privatization of healthcare providers affects the healthcare system in Poland.

The research was conducted in January 2008 among various social groups from five regions: Mazowieckie, Zachodniopomorskie, Śląskie, Lubuskie and Lubelskie. Author's questionnaire was used as a research tool. Twelve hundred questionnaires have been distributed and 740 ones have been correctly filled out and submitted. The results were statistically analyzed.

Most of the surveyed believe that privatization means changing an organizational and legal status of healthcare providers. Approximately 40% of the respondents think that privatization will limit access to healthcare services. About 48% believe that privatization will improve efficiency of the Polish healthcare system. The opinions of the surveyed people depend on their level of income, education and health status.

One can say that the public opinion is divided on the issue of privatization. The difference also concern the meaning itself of term of privatization.

**Key words:** privatization, healthcare system, access to healthcare services.

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## Introduction

Together with system transformation in Poland and so far traditional, dominating state property system of health care providers, the problem of expectation of greater efficiency and quality in functioning of state entities, has been growing. Particularly changes in economy have adopted radical dimension. The changes in organization and legislation and the new proprietor were considered the panaceum for the problems. Legal-organisational changes, including the property-related, also concerned health care. The state units have been taken over by territorial self-governing bodies as the founding organs. All of these units adopted in their names the term "public". The new "non-public" units included the new self-governing and also other ones, functioning on the basis of commercial code, or individual or group-like medical practices [1-3]. Every unit that became "non-public" has been perceived as a privatized unit. That fact caused a terminological confusion in social opinion. In primary perception, privatization meant economizing, rational activities, improvement of services quality and accessibility [4]. Health care services were supposed to be made more efficient. The experiences, frequently current, made the conditions of social disapproval in accepting the activities. It was especially vivid in small communities. There appeared concerns about losing the property, lack of guarantees of functioning, bankruptcies, quality deterioration and especially worsening of health care services accessibility. Economical approach in health care sector commonly made the privatization as commercialization.

## AIM

The research aimed to analyse the public opinion on the influence of privatization of health care units on the functioning of health protection system in Poland.

## METHODS

The research was carried out in January 2008 among various social groups from the five provinces: Mazowieckie, Zachodniopomorskie, Śląskie, Lubuskie and Lubelskie. The research had an anonymous character.

The research tool was author's survey designed for the research need. There were closed questions included in the survey. Twelve hundred questionnaires were distributed among the respondents and 740 correctly filled in ones were returned back. The results were statistically

For evaluating relationships between two features the Chi square independence test and Chi square independence test with Yates correction, were used. The adopted significance level was  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The following variables were considered: age, marital status, offspring, place of residence, education, professional status, professional activity, income.

## RESULTS

The respondents use the private health care services several times a year (43.2%), once a year (16.9%), and less than once a year (14.2%). About 18% of the respondents do not make use of private health care services (Table 1, Figure 1).

TABLE 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents.

Age	< 30 years old	44.72%
	31-40 years old	19.27%
	> 40 years old	36.01%
Monthly salary/person	< 700 PLN	25.32%
	701-1300 PLN	33.05%
	1301-1600 PLN	15.47%
	1601-2000 PLN	11.67%
	> 2000 PLN	14.49%
Place of residence	village	23.63%
	town < 25 thousand inhab.	20.53%
	25-150 thousand inhab.	42.62%
	>150 thousand inhab.	13.22%
Education	primary/vocational	16.01%
	secondary	47.68%
	higher	36.29%
Health condition	very good	21.79%
	good	47.12%
	satisfactory	22.93%
	poor	6.75%
	bad	1.41%
Sex	woman	66.39%
	man	33.61%

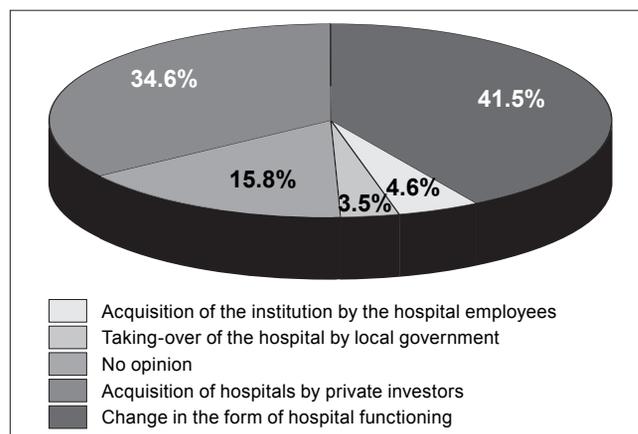


FIGURE 1. How do the respondents perceive privatisation of public health care providers?

The largest group (41.5%) think that privatisation of public health care sector is the change in organizational-legal form of health care facilities functioning.

A large group of the respondents (34.6%) perceive the privatization as acquisition of healthcare facilities by private investors (Table 2).

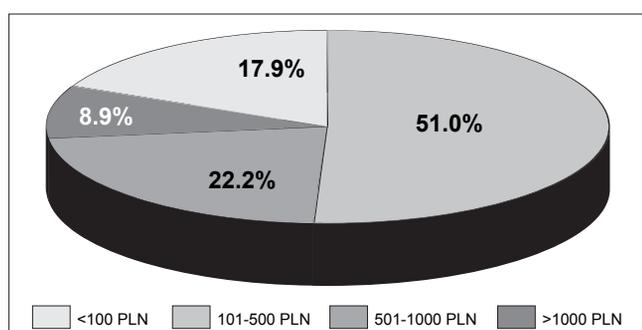
The respondents' education influenced significantly the perception of privatisation of public health care facilities ( $p < 0.05$ ). The respondents with primary or vocational education more frequently identified privatization as acquisition of hospitals by private investors (47.37%) than the respondents with secondary education (31.58%) and higher education (32.94%). Less frequently they pointed to the change in the form of hospital functioning (23.68%, 43.36%, 46.90% respectively).

No differences were confirmed in understanding of privatization of public health care facilities with regard to age, sex, place of residence and the income of the respondents. There is no statistically significant relationship at the confidence level  $> 95\%$ .

**TABLE 2. Perception of public health care facilities privatisation against respondents' education level.**

	Primary or vocational		Secondary		Higher	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acquisition of hospitals by private investors	54	47.37	107	31.58	85	32.94
Change in the form of hospital functioning	27	23.68	147	43.36	121	46.90
Acquisition of hospital by the employees	6	5.26	17	5.01	10	3.88
Taking over of hospital by local government	5	4.39	13	3.83	7	2.71
No opinion	22	19.30	55	16.22	35	13.57
Total	114	100.00	339	100.00	258	100.00
$\chi^2$			5.999			
p			<0.05			

Half of the respondents spend 101-500 PLN annually for private health services. About 22% spend 501-1000 PLN annually and about 18% of the respondents spend <100 PLN yearly; less than 9% spend more than 1000 PLN yearly for this purpose.

**FIGURE 2. Yearly expenses on private health care services.****TABLE 3. Yearly expenses on private health care services against the respondents' age.**

	<30 years old		31-40 years old		>40 years old	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 100 PLN	47	17.53	26	22.03	32	16.00
101-500 PLN	139	51.87	57	48.31	103	51.50
501-1000 PLN	56	20.90	24	20.34	50	25.00
> 1000 PLN	26	9.70	11	9.32	15	7.50
Total	268	100.00	118	100.00	200	100.00
$\chi^2$			7.441			
p			<0.05			

The collected data confirm that the respondents' age significantly diversifies their expenses on private health care services. The statistical analysis proved a statistically significant correlation between the respondents' age and the expenses on private health care services at confidence level higher than 95%.

**TABLE 4. Yearly expenses on private health care services against the respondents' place of residence.**

	Village		Town < 25 thousand inhabitants		Town > 25 thousand inhabitants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 100 PLN	32	25.40	30	24.79	43	12.69
101-500 PLN	67	53.17	57	47.11	175	51.62
501-1000 PLN	18	14.29	19	15.70	93	27.43
> 1000 PLN	9	7.14	15	12.40	28	8.26
Total	126	100.00	121	100.00	339	100.00
$\chi^2$			6.669			
p			<0.05			

The bigger the town in which the respondents live, the higher reported expenses on private health care services. Every third respondent from a big town (35.69%) spent yearly more than 500 PLN, while a respondent from small town – 28.10%; however the village respondent – 22.43%. The statistical analysis proved a relationship between the respondents' expenses on private health care services and the domicile.

**TABLE 5. Yearly expenses on private health care services against the respondents' income.**

	< 700 PLN		701-1300 PLN		> 1300 PLN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 100 PLN	30	23.07	37	18.97	38	14.56
101-500 PLN	76	58.46	99	50.77	124	47.51
501-1000 PLN	19	14.62	41	21.03	70	26.82
> 1000 PLN	5	3.85	18	9.23	29	11.11
Total	130	100.00	195	100.00	261	100.00
$\chi^2$			8.960			
p			<0.02			

The income per family member significantly influences the expenses incurred by the respondents for private health care services ( $p<0,02$ ). Respondents with the highest incomes definitely more frequently spent more than 1000 PLN yearly (11.11%) or from 501-1000 PLN (26.82%) than the respondents having monthly income between 701-1300 PLN (9.23% and 21.03% respectively) and below 7000 PLN (3.85% and 14.62%).

When using health care services in the private sector the respondents most frequently pay for each appointment (91.2%). Little proportion use private health care services funded by private health insurance (1.6%) or within medical subscription (2.8%) and by physician's favour (4.4%) – Figure 3.

One third of the respondents think that privatization of public health care providers will not limit the access to medical services. About 26% of the respondents think that after privatization the access to health care services will be limited and almost 14% are convinced that this will happen; one fifth of the respondents have no opinion in this field (Figure 4).

Privatisation of public health care providers will make the functioning of the whole health protection system more

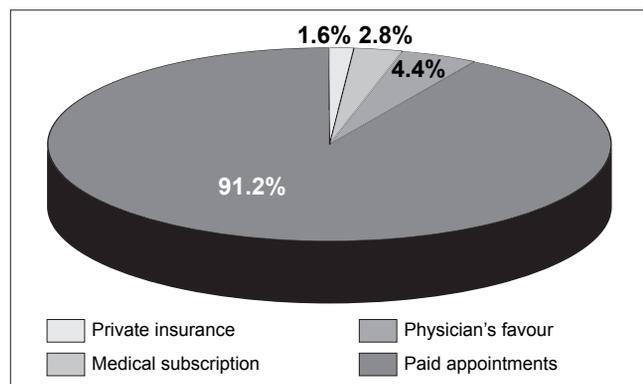


FIGURE 3. Forms of using private health care services.

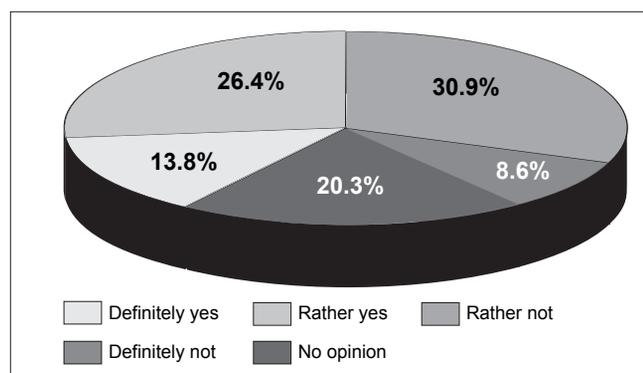


FIGURE 4. The opinion of respondents that privatisation of public health care providers will limit the access to medical services.

efficient in the opinion half of the respondents (rather yes – 37.3% and definitely yes – 10.7%). Almost 30% of the respondents have the opposite opinion (rather not – 20.7% and definitely not – 7.9%, Figure 5, Table 6).

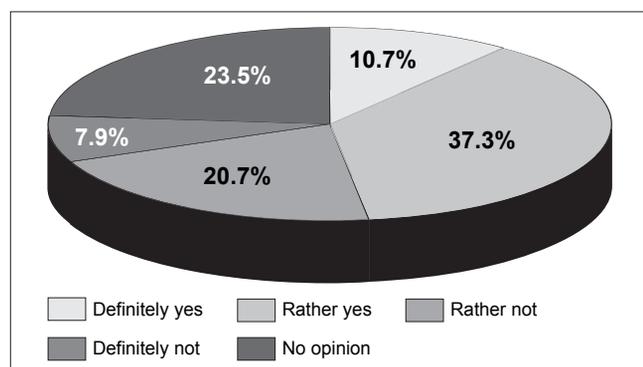


FIGURE 5. The opinion of respondents that privatisation of public health care providers will make the functioning of health protection system more efficient.

The respondents with higher education most frequently thought that privatisation of public health care providers will make the whole health protection system more efficient (11.63% definitely yes, 41.47% – rather yes). The respondents with secondary education had more doubts about this (10.62% and 36.8% respectively); however in the group with primary or vocational education the proportion of respondents expressing their positive opinion in that area was the lowest (8.77% and 28.95%). Education level significantly influenced the opinion of the respondents ( $p < 0.05$ , Table 7).

TABLE 6. The opinion of respondents that privatisation of public health care providers will make the functioning of health protection system more efficient against the respondents' education.

	Primary or vocational		Średnie		Wyższe	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	10	8.77	36	10.62	30	11.63
Rather yes	33	28.95	125	36.87	107	41.47
Rather not	24	21.05	84	24.78	39	15.12
Definitely not	8	7.02	28	8.26	20	7.75
No opinion	39	34.21	66	19.47	62	24.03
Total	114	100.00	339	100.00	258	100.00
$\chi^2$	6.569					
p	<0.05					

TABLE 7. The opinion of respondents that privatisation of public health care providers will make the functioning of health protection system more efficient against the respondents' income.

	< 700 PLN		701-1300 PLN		> 1300 PLN	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	12	6.66	21	8.93	43	14.53
Rather yes	55	30.56	94	40.00	116	39.19
Rather not	46	25.56	47	20.00	54	18.24
Definitely not	16	8.89	19	8.09	21	7.09
No opinion	51	28.33	54	22.98	62	20.95
Total	180	100.00	235	100.00	296	100.00
$\chi^2$	7.700					
p	<0.02					

The collected data and the statistical analysis confirmed a statistically highly significant relationship between the respondents' opinion that the privatization of public health care providers will make the whole system of health protection more efficient, and the respondents' income ( $p < 0.02$ ). The advantages of this idea were most frequently expressed by the respondents with monthly income above 1300 PLN, and the least frequently – by respondents with monthly income below 700 PLN.

TABLE 8. The opinion of respondents that privatisation of public health care providers will make the functioning of health protection system more efficient against the respondents' health condition.

	Very good		Good		Average or poor	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	25	16.13	38	11.35	13	5.88
Rather yes	73	47.10	109	32.54	83	37.56
Rather not	22	14.19	78	23.28	47	21.27
Definitely not	7	4.52	25	7.46	24	10.86
No opinion	28	18.06	85	25.37	54	24.43
Total	155	100.00	335	100.00	221	100.00
$\chi^2$	8.055					
p	<0.02					

The respondents with very good self-evaluation of their health condition in higher proportion (definitely yes – 16.13% and rather yes – 47.10%) have the opinion that privatization of health care providers will make the whole system of health protection more efficient, as compared to the respondents with good, average or poor self-estimation of health condition ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Privatisation of health care brings considerable benefits but one should also remember that incompetent and uncontrolled execution of that process may be risk-related. [5]. The health care sector is subject to market economy only to some extent and in a specific way. There are attempts to find economic-administration mechanisms that would define the change between the quantitative and qualitative part of health care demands, as too strong market mechanism may contribute to great limitation in access to medical services; on the other hand however, a high interventionism of the state (as the system of 1999 showed) may lead to waste of resources [1-4].

In the presented study privatisation of health care is meant by the majority of respondents as the change in the form of health care provider functioning or as acquisition of hospitals by private investors. Half of the respondents spend on private health care services from 101 to 500 PLN yearly. About 22% spend on this purpose from 501 to 1000 PLN, and about 18% – 100 PLN yearly; less than 9% spend more than 1000 PLN for health care services yearly. The bigger the town of residence and the higher education level of the respondents, the increased expenses reported for private health care services. This accounts for a bigger sum of money designated for private health care by the respondents than the mean sum reported in the 2007 study equaling to 25 PLN monthly. However, every tenth Pole spent for this purpose about 500 PLN yearly [6].

One third of the respondents think that privatization of public health care providers will not limit the access to medical services. About 26% of the respondents have the opinion that privatization will limit the access to health care services. Privatisation of public health care providers will make the whole system of health protection more efficient in the opinion of half of the respondents (rather yes – 37.3% and definitely yes – 10.7%).

Almost 30% of the respondents have opposite opinion. The respondents' opinions are differentiated by their income, education and health condition.

According with the research carried out for *Rzeczpospolita*, Poles think that private medical centres offer higher quality services than those offered by public health care providers. At the same time they are still afraid of total privatization of health care services. The respondents still

support further development of private hospitals and medical centres, but as much as 44% think that at the same time there should be left powerful public health care providers. Only 19% of the respondents think that without reservation they accept further expansion of private capital in this sector [7].

## CONCLUSION

There is no common opinion as to privatisation of health care providers in Poland. The meaning of privatisation is also perceived in various ways. Privatisation of health care is perceived by the majority of respondents as the change in functioning of health care providers or acquisition of hospitals by private investors. A big group have the opinion that privatization of healthcare will limit the access to medical services. A half of the respondents think that privatization will make the functioning of the whole system of health care in Poland more efficient. The respondents' opinions are differentiated by their income, education and health condition.

Therefore the society should be provided with a thorough knowledge on the changes in health protection which are inevitable and in which they will participate actively.

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