

**162: "WHY ARE WE WAITING?" : UNDERSTANDING THE "WAITING LIST CULTURE" IN NORWEGIAN HOSPITALS.**

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**Objective:**

The aim of this study is to assess the "waiting list culture" in Norwegian hospitals.

**Method:**

A semi-structured interview was conducted of physicians (N=20) at 4 Norwegian hospitals with long waiting lists. All participants were interviewed individually by the authors at their hospital office. The average length of the interviews was 45 minutes, ranging from 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim. Interviewer field notes were also transcribed and treated as text for analysis.

**Results:**

Normative rules for the length of waiting lists are in effect in hospital departments. These rules exist to a large extent independently of the capacity of departments, but are instead closely connected to the local assessment of "desirability" and "necessity". Two important assessment issues are:

1. The use of waiting lists as buffers due to both random changes in the inflow of acute patients and random variations in capacity.
2. The use of waiting-lists as strategic tools in budget processes;
  - waiting-lists affirm myths of significant under-funding, and
  - waiting-lists violate the general moral assumptions of equality and accessibility in a public health care system.

**Conclusions:**

The existence of long waiting lists can neither be understood as a mechanical misfit between resources and patients to be treated, nor as a rational priority system for the treatment of patients. Instead waiting lists are an important part of a complex institutional structure that decouples the systems of production and finance.