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Swiss healthcare: is it still fit for purpose?

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Healthcare staff in Switzerland are being pushed to the brink



It is a big number as well as being entirely abstract: 82,000,000,000 Swiss francs. This is the sum spent on Swiss healthcare every year. Is it a lot or not that much?

The best way to answer that question is to break down the figure into something more tangible: Swiss healthcare costs 800 francs per person every month. Or 3,200 francs for the average family of four – every month. A significant portion of these costs comes straight out of the family budget. This makes obligatory healthcare premiums in Switzerland impressively – or, depending on a person's income, depressingly – high. At the same time, Swiss healthcare is not just expensive but also of excellent quality by international standards. Nevertheless, it is still anything but perfect.

The “care” in Swiss healthcare is increasingly falling by the wayside as workers are being pushed ever closer to their limits, something that was the case even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pressure has become unhealthy. Moreover, as an ageing society demands more of its healthcare system, this pressure is only going to increase in the future. Healthcare workers are putting their own health at risk, as reported in this edition's Focus article.

A popular initiative calling for an overhaul of the healthcare system will go to a vote on 28 November. The initiative calls for an increase in staffing numbers and a major increase in investment in training for the sector. Hardly anyone claims that the demands are entirely without justification. At the same time, the initiative presents a dilemma: increasing staffing numbers would make healthcare even more expensive – and there is no known remedy to heal all the ailments of the Swiss healthcare system.

Many Swiss Abroad have another adverse development to contend with additionally. Since the Federal Council broke off negotiations with the European Union over a framework agreement, many Swiss Abroad, especially those living in the EU, fear that they will be disadvantaged at some point. This is adding to the resentment that many people in the “Fifth Switzerland” have regarding the difficulties they face when registering their votes in Swiss elections.

Therefore, the message for the newly elected President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Ticino politician Filippo Lombardi, and for the radically overhauled Council of the Swiss Abroad is clear: their first duty is to deal with a couple of familiar challenges.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Community**