

Thousands in Spain protest health privatization

December 17 2012, by Harold Heckle



Protestors hold a banner reading, 'Not for sale' during a demonstration against regional government-imposed austerity plans to restructure and part-privatize health care sector in Madrid, Spain, Sunday, Dec. 16, 2012. Madrid proposes selling off the management of six of 20 public hospitals and 27 of 268 health centers. Spain's regions are struggling with a combined debt of 145 billion euro (\$190 billion) as the country's economy contracts into a double-dip recession triggered by a 2008 real estate crash. (AP Photo/Andres Kudacki)

(AP)—Several thousand Spanish public health workers and other people marched from four main hospitals in Madrid to converge on a main square in the capital Sunday, protesting the regional government's plans to restructure and part-privatize the sector.

The marches, described as a "white tide" because of the color of the medical scrubs many were wearing, finally met mid-afternoon in Puerta del Sol. On Monday, the region's health councilor will meet with a committee responsible for coordinating professional services and union representatives to try and agree how to achieve €533 million (\$697 million) in savings.

Doctors, nurses and public health users—grouped into four columns—marched from leading hospitals located in the north, south, east and west of the capital.

"Our [health care system](#) is going to be damaged," said Alberto Garcia, 26. "Patients are doomed to get a much worse service and this will just make us poorer."

Health care and education are administered by Spain's 17 semi-autonomous regions rather than the central government and Madrid proposes selling off the management of six of 20 large [public hospitals](#) and 27 of 268 [health centers](#).

Spain's regions are struggling with a combined debt of €145 billion (\$190 billion) as the country's economy contracts into a double-dip recession triggered by a 2008 real estate crash.

Madrid's government, under regional president Ignacio Gonzalez, maintains cuts and sell-offs are needed to secure health services during a deep recession.

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