

Tonio Borg

Member of the European Commission, responsible for Health

Commissioner Borg delivers speech on responsible health systems, the health workforce, and patient care

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health, attends the Annual Conference of the Standing Committee of European Doctors

Brussels, Belgium, 04 April 2014

COMMISSIONER BORG'S PARTICIPATION AT
THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF STANDING COMMITTEE OF EUROPEAN DOCTORS
[COMITE PERMANENT DES MEDECINS EUROPEENS (CPME)]

BRUSSELS

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The International Auditorium, Boulevard du Roi Albert II, No. 5 / 2, B-1210
Brussels

CLOSING ADDRESS

President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for your kind invitation to address this annual conference of the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME).

You have asked me to close this meeting with some thoughts on the outlook for responsible health systems, with particular reference to the health workforce and patient care. And I am most pleased to comply.

Before I start, however, let me say that I have the very highest respect for medical doctors, for the invaluable contribution you make to people's lives, to population health, and to society as a whole.

The theme of today's conference - “responsible health systems policy” - certainly strikes a chord with our European Health agenda.

When I took office in November of 2012, I set myself three broad priorities.

The first of these was to shift the widely-held perception of health expenditure as a "cost", towards the perception of health as an investment that contributes to inclusive economic growth. Investment, which of course, includes the education and training of health professionals.

I believe we are making steady progress – this principle underpins the Commission's policy on 'Investing in Health', which establishes health in EU's 2020 Strategy for growth and employment.

Our starting point in this endeavour is that health is a value in itself, and is also a pre-condition for economic growth and social cohesion.

Second, I am committed to fighting discrimination in health in all its forms.

Everybody should have access to good quality healthcare regardless of their gender, age, race, sexual orientation, social status, education or location.

One of my particular concerns is the need to overcome stigma and discrimination in healthcare amongst particularly vulnerable groups.

Third, I focussed on delivering key legislative proposals which I believe will have a major impact on people's lives.

Let me mention two in particular:

- First the revision of the Tobacco Products Directive, which will ensure that tobacco products look and taste like tobacco products, so as to make them less attractive, in particular to young people.

I know that you share my conviction that large picture warnings, as well as the prohibition of characterising flavours will lead to fewer young people taking up smoking.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Standing Committee of European Doctors for your strong support towards an outcome which should pay long-term dividends in terms of public health.

- In addition, we have now reached agreement on a new Regulation on Clinical Trials.

I am aware that the CPME expressed certain reservations during the course of the negotiations. I consider, however, that we have reached a good outcome which addresses your concerns.

Patients have suffered (and continue to suffer) as a result of the decrease of clinical research in Europe – and it is patients who will benefit most from the new Regulation.

The new Regulation will ensure a high level of patient protection, while at the same time fostering clinical research in Europe, which is necessary to develop new and better treatments.

Allow me to turn now to matters relating to the future of the health workforce.

Health systems cannot deliver high quality care to all Europeans without a well-trained health workforce of sufficient capacity. People's health and safety very much depends on this.

This is why the Commission's 2012 Action Plan for the EU health workforce puts the spotlight on the serious risks of staff shortages in the health sector, and the need to avoid skills mismatches.

Health professionals need to be equipped with the right skills and competences throughout their careers, to stay up-to-date with technological advances and new clinical approaches.

Of course, with the increasing mobility of health professionals, continuous professional development is even more important.

This is why the recently adopted revised Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications encourages Member States to ensure such continuous professional development, so as to ensure safe and effective practices.

I am therefore pleased that DG SANCO is working together with the CPME and the consortium of health professional organisations in the study on approaches to continuous professional development across Europe; study which we support through the Health programme.

This study will help improve mutual understanding on professional development, and I look forward to your recommendations on ways to strengthen European co-operation in this area, which will further support patient safety throughout the European Union.

I also warmly welcome the commitment and expert input of the CPME to the shaping of a European guide on education and training of health professionals in patient safety.

As you will have heard today, our recent public consultation on patient safety confirmed that the majority of stakeholders see an added value for the EU to work on quality of care.

This is an important message which I will pass on to EU Health Ministers, together with the Commission's second report on patient safety to be published soon.

We now need to reflect on how to continue action linked to the EU network on patient safety and quality of care, when the Joint Action that co-funds it under the Health Programme comes to an end in Spring next year.

The Network provides a useful mechanism for mutual learning on patient safety practices and quality improvement strategies.

It represents, in my view, a successful collaboration between all EU Member States and many stakeholders – patients, health professionals, healthcare managers and academia – that clearly demonstrates an interest in common work on patient safety and quality of care at EU level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The provision of good quality healthcare relies on a skilled and highly-motivated health workforce.

And while many of the issues that determine the working conditions of this workforce are shaped and determined at national level, your discussions this morning certainly highlight that the EU can indeed make a valuable contribution and provide a great deal of added value.

Let me conclude by stressing the crucial importance of the involvement of medical and non-governmental organisations such as the CPME in shaping policy decisions and future direction.

I deeply value your involvement and input – and fully trust that that our fruitful exchanges will continue in future.

Thank you.