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Cross-border care – movement of professionals

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share with you some views and reflections on cross-border care as a very important part of health care in the European Union, today and in the future. A health care where we will see, as a significant characteristic and condition, not only an increased patient but also professional mobility throughout the Union.

When talking about health care in the European Union, it is of course important to underline that according to the treaty the responsibility for organizing and financing a well functioning sustainable health care service, with high quality and safety for the citizens, rests with the Member States. On the other hand, we are very well aware that according to rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Communities, on certain conditions, the right of free movement of patients is to be looked upon exactly as the free movement of services, people, goods and capital within the internal market. At the same time an optimal free movement of health professionals is to be safeguarded by a well functioning directive on professional recognition.

It is in line with the present treaty as well as the recently adopted new constitution and with the views of many, including the citizens of the EU, that one goal and vision of the EU must be the right of all its citizens to health care of equal quality, safety and access according to their needs.

Cross-border care is well established in EU according to the HOPE report from 2003 on hospital co-operation in border regions in Europe. It is seen and functioning throughout EU, although so far more established in the western parts.

What we see when we look at today's cross-border care are the reflections and results of initiatives taken by local health care and other professionals, local politicians, citizens and patients. Initiatives that have come out of demands and wishes and through a co-operation to



enhance and improve quality, access, safety and efficiency in health care. It also reflects co-operation that does not limit itself to medical treatment and care but also includes activities such as exchange of professionals, education, continuing profession development, research, tele-medicine, share of equipment, management, funding and organizational structure. Today's cross-border care can serve as a good example of an important feature in the future of all Member States' health care systems. Co-operation will be an absolute necessity if in the future, especially with an ageing population and therefore increasing demands on health care, all Member States are going to succeed in upholding health care systems with high quality, safety and sustainability.

This co-operation will of course not limit itself to only cross-border care activities. In order to keep up and be in touch with all EU citizens' wishes and demands on their national health care systems, the future co-operation will see no borders at all in the European Union.

If this member state co-operation is to function in an optimal way the European Union and the Commission will have to play an even greater role than today in taking initiatives - like they have done in a most positive way for the last five years - as facilitator, coordinator, promoter and supporter of co-operative work between Member States on both public health as well as health care issues.

Today's cross-border care can also serve as an important reference for not only the possibilities but also the obstacles and problems that arise and therefore have to be solved. Although we all share the same values and aims for the health care concerning quality and safety there are still many differences throughout the European Union on issues such as funding, language, attitudes, information, safety routines, CPD and assessment of quality issues that have to be solved in concrete and practical ways by all Member States and the European Union.

It was therefore very positive and of utmost importance that a High Level Reflection Process on future health care within the Union was carried through last year with participation of



Member States, the European Commission and several other stakeholders including CPME. Many important concrete suggestions, later supported by the Commission in its Communication, came out of that process. The most important result so far is the establishment from July this year of a High Level Group on Health Services and Medical Care that hopefully will take on the responsibility of shaping and leading the co-operation on health within the European Union.

This High Level Group will have a key function and assume the responsibility, among other things, for continuously analysing and presenting solutions to all obstacles and hindrances to well-functioning cross-border care, patient and professional mobility and all other issues that have to be faced and dealt with in order to safeguard sustainable health care of equal quality, safety and access for all citizens, according to their needs, throughout the European Union.

The High Level Group will in the near future hopefully have on its agenda issues and items such as

- the final development of a well functioning, transparent, simple and optimal directive on professional recognition in support of professional mobility
- simple, transparent and sufficient information on rules and conditions for patient mobility, as well as rights and duties of patients
- full access for all citizens to information and knowledge on health care as well as public health issues throughout the European Union,
- shared values and criteria on quality in health care in order to establish equal standards throughout the European Union,
- new and shared attitudes to patient safety on a no-fault basis in combination with an active preventive safety work and a patient insurance scheme
- gradual implementation of evidence-based medicine as the core of health care through concrete co-operation in health technology assessment
- exchange of best practice through clinical guidelines or disease-management programs
- development of e-health as a communicative support to co-operation and, in particular, to patient as well as professional mobility



- structuring and defining centres of excellence or reference to safeguard health care equality according to the needs of all patients throughout the European Union
- analysis of structural and economical needs in order to meet demands of an increasingly older population
- co-operation in the field of continuing professional development, CPD, for all health care professionals in order to guarantee equality, on a high level of competence, throughout the European Union.

In order to strengthen and facilitate work and co-operation on all public health and health care issues it is of utmost importance to clearly assign the responsibility for all these issues including the right and duty to influence policies that have any impact on health. Greater influence and stronger responsibility of DG SANCO on all public health and health issues will take the European Union closer to fulfilling the key paragraph in article III-278, section 1, Public Health that reads “A high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all Union’s policies and activities.”

Thus, in the future, a well functioning High Level Group can play an important additional role when the EU and, above all, the Member States face the challenge of sustaining good health for all citizens throughout Europe. A well functioning High Level Group must, on the other hand, in one way or the other include the participation and influence of health care professionals and other stakeholders in health care. It is therefore extremely important that a transparent, open and fruitful dialogue is started between, on one hand, the Member States and the Commission and on the other hand professionals and other stakeholders, in order to take full advantage of the experience and knowledge of all these groups. A dialogue developed out of the present Health Policy Forum and The Open Health Policy Forum could be a way forward.

In summary the health care systems of the Member States face substantial challenges in order to uphold high quality, safety and equal access to all citizens, according to their needs, in the future. Due to medical development and technological advancement as well as



demographical changes, with an increasing percentage of old and very old in the European population, health care cost will continue to grow. Costs will also go up as a consequence of prosperity and better standard of living with demands on improvements in such aspects as health care safety, quality and accessibility. These demands are such that the costs will not be met by general GDP-growth. The Member States must be prepared to meet this rise in cost. Adequate spending on health and health care is absolutely essential in the development and welfare of any society.

On the other hand we also see some very positive changes and initiatives that have to be further supported in order to fulfil the mutual wish of health care throughout Europe for all citizens of equal access, quality and safety. We see cross-border care being established and developed. Important steps have also been taken by the Commission and Member States in order to co-operate on health care as well as public health issues in line with a strengthened constitution on the issue of health protection for all. Finally we see an ever-growing engagement and responsibility on behalf of patients, professionals and other stakeholders in order to enhance and develop co-operation, patient and professional mobility in order to fundamentally strengthen future health and health care for all citizens throughout Europe.

To solve problems and overcome challenges, especially concerning the ageing population Member States and stakeholders have to co-operate, on the sustainability of all health care systems within the European Union. The present dialogue has to be continued and strengthened, mutual goals be put in focus, and realistic and concrete projects be launched. All this will consume time and resources, but we cannot refrain from a Union-wide co-operation that can create adequate health care services for all its citizens.

Thank you for your attention.