

Interview

LISETTE TIDDENS-ENGWIRDA

Secretary General, CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors)

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Q: Could you start by telling me a few words about the CPME?

LT: We are an umbrella organization representing approximately 2 million doctors across the European Union. Our members are the most representative national doctors' associations in the 25 EU Member States, plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. Our goal is to improve the quality of care and training across Europe, and we primarily work directly with the EU institutions.

Q: What do you make of the Platform Initiative?

LT: We are a founding member of the Platform for Action - we had

no hesitation in getting involved because we follow the obesity issue very closely. The EU has a very definite added value in the fight against obesity, because when the EU takes action it prevents everyone else from having to reinvent the wheel. We therefore welcome the Platform very much.

Q: What has the CPME done as part of the Platform?

LT: One of our commitments is that we are organizing a Round Table conference on prevention which will take place in 2007, looking at issues related to obesity, like cardiovascular diseases and so on. Our members are also collecting input on what is being done at national level against obesity, and the journals of our member associations are starting

to publish articles on obesity. We are constantly monitoring our commitments.

Another interesting project is that we are asking doctors to lose weight in order to act as role models – a similar project was done a while ago on tobacco. We are also asking our member organizations to push their national governments for very concrete action points: initiatives like healthy meals in schools, and so on. There are encouraging signs as far as the promotion of healthy lifestyles is concerned: we welcome for example the campaign the Dutch government has now launched saying “no alcohol at 16”.

Q: Do you think self-regulation works?

LT: If self-regulation could solve the obesity issue, we would welcome it. Self-regulation can be a very positive way of achieving things, but we should not exclude regulation. It is difficult for the industry to voluntarily regulate in the most altruistic way. Labelling and advertising, for instance, are two fields where regulation can be useful.

Q: One year on, what do you think are the main achievements and weaknesses of the Platform?

LT: I think it's too early to really take stock. But the Platform is a fantastic initiative which shows

that the EU has real added value on things. A number of different actions have now started up, and I hope people will hang in there and continue. The most important step, the actual completion of these commitments, is now on the agenda.

One great achievement of the Platform is that since it was started, it has shed light on the extent of the obesity problem. The Platform has helped raise awareness of the obesity issue with the public, governments and the media – it is now very much in the public sphere.

Q: Do you think there is a risk that all this emphasis on obesity is taking attention away from other health issues which are just as important, like cancer and so on?

LT: This Platform is about obesity and so our focus should be on the obesity crisis. Of course all these other health issues have to be tackled as well, in different areas – but I do not think the Platform pushes these other issues away.

Q: Do you think the projects which have sprung up within the Platform are initiatives that would not have happened otherwise?

LT: Of course the Platform has had an influence, but the industry also realizes that if they do not act, it

will cost them – I like to think that it would have occurred to them to do something about the obesity crisis even without the Platform. But the Platform has certainly helped create a push for more action. Ultimately, however, individual responsibility is what this is all about – the only way to succeed is if we get across to the individual. ■