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Commission consults on cross-border health services

After health services were excluded from the services directive, the Commission decided to establish an EU framework on healthcare services to ensure cross-border access to healthcare in the EU. The Commission believes that this kind of framework is needed to provide clarity and legal certainty on EU citizens' right to seek healthcare in other member states, with the cost being covered by their own health system. Currently, a number of individual European Court of Justice (ECJ) rulings guarantee such rights in certain cases.

Commissioners held an orientation debate on the issue on 5 September 2006.

Issues:

The Commission has adopted a Communication for consultation regarding the establishment of an EU framework on healthcare services to ensure cross-border access to safe, high-quality and efficient care. The focus is to provide legal certainty for cross-border patients and help co-operation between member states' health services.

"Community law provides patients with rights to cross-border care under Community law, but we need a clear, practical framework to reconcile greater individual choice with the sustainability of health systems overall," explained Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou.

The Consultation regarding Community action on health services communication, adopted on 26 September 2006, launches a public consultation seeking input from member states, the European Parliament, patients, health professionals, healthcare purchasers (social security institutions) and providers, as well as regional and national health authorities. The Commission is asking for comments on nine specific questions to know:

Where greater legal certainty is required;
areas where EU action could support more member state co-operation and the tools to do so, and;
the impact of cross-border healthcare for both 'sending' and 'receiving' countries.
Latest & next steps:

Public consultation on the Commission communication is open until 31 January 2007.
The Commission will, later in 2007, come up with concrete proposals for Community action on the issue.
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