

Commission takes steps to promote patient safety in Europe

The Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou, said: "Patient safety is the cornerstone of good quality healthcare. I would like to see a Europe for patients where safety is paramount and citizens are confident and knowledgeable about the care they receive."

Each year in the EU, between 8% and 12% of patients admitted to hospitals suffer harm from the healthcare they receive, including healthcare associated infections. Healthcare associated infections, incorrect or delayed diagnoses, surgical errors and medication related errors are the most common problems. Most efforts to improve patient safety at Member State and EU levels have so far focused on specific causes but most adverse events are caused by a combination of factors which together result in harm to the patients.

The Commission Communication recommends a comprehensive approach to improving patient safety. Member States are encouraged to put in place and improve strategies to prevent and control adverse events in all healthcare settings. The primary focus is on addressing systemic and organisational failures responsible for most harm to patients. Key recommendations for Member States include, for example: establishing or strengthening reporting and learning systems; embedding patient safety in the education and training of healthcare workers; involving patients in the development of safety measures; and providing patients with relevant information on health risks and safety issues. Member States are also encouraged to share best practice and expertise in this field. The Commission will work with Member States to develop common definitions and indicators for patient safety.

The proposal also includes a special focus on healthcare associated infections as the annual number of patients in the EU with at least one hospital acquired infection is estimated at 4.1 million patients. Key recommendations for Member States include: putting in place specific measures to prevent and control infections; ensuring that infection prevention and control is enhanced in hospitals; and having effective systems in place to detect and report infections.

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