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EU News

European Parliament Commits to Improving Patient Safety

The European Parliament has adopted a report backing measures to reduce the number of infections in hospitals. These measures include support for research into this area, better education and information for both patients and staff and also the recruitment of specialised nurses.

Patient safety has always been of great concern in the hospital environment; hospital acquired infections (HAIs), medication-related events and complications during or after operations are prevalent in European hospitals. In order to combat these sometimes easily avoidable problems, MEPs are being asked to approve a draft Council recommendation on patient safety. The report was drafted by Amalia Sartori (EPPED, IT) and was adopted with 521 votes in favour, six against and five abstentions.

MEPs have called for a 20% improvement in patient safety by 2015. A 20% reduction of "adverse events" equates to 900,000 less cases a year. At the present moment, according to statistics from the Commission, between 8 and 12% of patients (meaning 6.7 to 15 million inpatients per year) admitted into European hospitals experience these "adverse events."

These problems stretch well beyond the hospitals. It is reported that 37 million primary care patients are also affected by these "adverse events" through the treatment they receive.

246 Million Euros to Support Public-Private Cooperation for Better Medicines

15 new research projects have been selected to receive 246 million euros within the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a public-private partnership, also known as the Joint Technology Initiative, between the European Commission and the pharmaceutical industry. The Commission contributed 110 million euros and 136 million euros is coming from the industry.

This is the first time that pharmaceutical competitors are pooling their resources with research organisations, patient groups and other stakeholders to develop generic, pre-competitive knowledge. The research projects will focus on diabetes, pain, severe asthma, psychiatric disorders and also increasing drug safety.

150 applications were received and the best consortia were chosen to form joint project teams. 15 projects from these teams have been selected. They will address the main causes of delay or "bottlenecks" in pharmaceutical research and development processes. The overall objectives are to encourage the rapid discovery and development of better medicines, improving competitiveness within the industry, increasing the safety and efficacy of medicines and improving education and training.

The contract for the 15 projects should be finished by November 2009 and a second call for proposals is to be launched in Autumn 2009 for projects dealing with oncology, diagnosis of infectious diseases, chronic inflammatory diseases and knowledge management.

Janez Potocnik, the EU Commissioner for Science and Research has said that, "In times of crisis, such a model of cooperation is proving well suited to answering both EU competitiveness objectives and public health needs."

For more information, please visit

<http://imi.europa.eu> and www.imi-europe.org

European Ageing Report 2009

A recent European economic report has shown that the recession may prove to be a huge setback in countries' struggle to tackle the challenges of an ageing population. Countries have already put millions of euros into their failing economies in a bid to stabilise the system and promote growth. Consequently countries that had previously made good progress reducing their deficits are simply returning to square one. This will not help in preparing the system for the implications of an older population.

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People are living longer, in 50 years time the population will be older but only slightly larger. The median age is expected to rise to 48 as birth rates are low and migration is slowing. This means an increase in costs for pensions, healthcare costs and long-term care for the elderly.

Figures in the report indicate that by 2060, spending will rise by an average of 4.7% of GDP and as this is only the average increase, other European countries will face much greater increases in spending. The report is not entirely pessimistic, claiming "There is still a window of opportunity." Indeed it is widely agreed that the next few years, before the baby boomers retire in large numbers, are crucial in preparing for an increasingly older population but action needs to be taken now.

For more information, please visit http://ec.europa.eu/news/economy/090429_1_en.htm

Benchmarking Deployment of e-Health Services

The European Commission has issued a call for proposals for a study to benchmark the deployment of e-health services across Europe. The overall aim of the study is to progress towards the development of a standardised survey on the adoption of ICT and e-health solutions in hospitals.

The chosen contractor will liaise with relevant associations and international organisations and analyse similar studies carried out outside Europe, in order to overcome as many semantic and terminological differences as possible.

The study also aims to identify the main challenges and gaps in ehealth services and some best practices in order to support further policy development in the e-health field in the framework of the initiative that will follow the i2010 strategy.

The study will cover EU27, Norway, Iceland and Croatia.

For more information, please visit http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/studies/index_en.htm

New OECD Publications on Aging, Healthcare and Obesity

Three new Working Papers have been published: "Policies for Healthy Ageing: An Overview", "Measuring Healthcare Disparities" and "The Obesity Epidemic: Analysis of Past and Projected Future Trends in Selected OECD Countries."

"Policies for Healthy Ageing: An Overview" stressed the importance of maintaining health in old age. This could in turn increase the potential labour force and supply of non-market services to others and delay the need for longer-term care for the elderly. The report promotes "active aging": delaying retirement, increased community activities and better lifestyles. Health systems must also be adapted to the needs of the elderly, cost-effective prevention should be a priority. The paper also stresses that more research on this topic is needed.

"Measuring Healthcare Disparities" recognises the general policy adopted by European and worldwide countries of reducing the inequalities in health and providing equal access to healthcare based on need. It is thought that an evidence-based approach is needed to measure progress in this area.

"The Obesity Epidemic: Analysis of Past and Projected Future Trends in Selected OECD Countries" explores the main causes and patterns concerning the current obesity epidemic and highlights possible policies to deal with negative health effects it brings.

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