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EU News

New Research Challenges in the Area of Infectious Diseases

Dr Marc Sprenger, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), spoke about the new research challenges in the area of infectious diseases at the Shanghai Expo seminar on Research for Healthy Life.

Sprenger stressed that the public health research agenda needs to be wider than just bio-medical research. Research must focus on:

How infectious diseases are spread;

The effectiveness of interventions to prevent infection; and

How to motivate people to take the steps to protect themselves from being infected.

In order to achieve this Sprenger believes that more interdisciplinary research projects are needed and behavioural sciences, especially health communication science, should be integrated into public health research.

He also stressed that one of the biggest challenges in public health is “understanding how to motivate people to adopt healthy behaviours”. Indeed, he went on to state that, “public health officials in Europe... need to understand why our advice is so often ignored by the public. We need to design new, more effective ways to communicate.” This requires multidisciplinary research.

Council Agrees on New Rules for Patients’ Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare

The Council in charge of Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs has agreed on a draft directive concerning the application of patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare, on the basis of a compromise proposal of the Spanish Presidency.

The draft directive aims to facilitate the access to safe and high-quality cross-border healthcare and to promote cooperation on healthcare across member states. The compromise reflects the Council’s intention to fully respect the case law of the European Court of Justice on the patients’ rights while preserving member states’ rights to organise their own healthcare systems. The draft directive provides clarity about the rights of patients who seek healthcare in another member state and supplements the rights patients already have on an EU level.

The directive includes the following provisions:

Patients will be allowed to receive healthcare in another member state and be reimbursed up to the level of reimbursement applicable for the same or similar treatment in their national health system if the patients are entitled to this treatment in their country of affiliation;

Member states may manage the outgoing flows of patients also by asking a prior authorisation for certain healthcare;

Member states of treatment will have to ensure, via national contact points, that patients from other EU countries receive on request information on safety and quality standards on their territory in order to enable patients to make an informed choice;

The cooperation between member states in the field of healthcare is strengthened, for example in the field of e-health and through the development of European reference networks; and

The recognition of prescriptions issued in another member state is improved.

The draft directive is part of the social agenda package of 2 July 2008, focusing on a triple objective: to guarantee that all patients have care that is safe and of good quality, to support patients in the exercise of their rights to cross-border healthcare; and to promote cooperation between health systems. After the legal-linguistic revision of the draft directive, the Council will adopt its position at first reading and forward it to the European Parliament for its second reading.

Belgian Presidency of the EU and Health Policy

The key words underlining the health policy of the Belgian Presidency are solidarity and innovation. The Council will enter into policy discussions on the way in which Member States and the Commission manage public health risks together, in particular as a result of evaluation of the influenza pandemic. There will also be conclusions adopted on nuclear medicine and radioisotopes.

Negotiations on the draft directive relating to cross-border healthcare will continue and particular attention will be devoted to the question of professionals from the healthcare sector, to the determining social factors of health, to the fight against cancer and chronic illnesses, as well as to solidarity and innovation in the proprietary medicinal products sector.

The Council will continue to work on legislative initiatives constituting the pharmaceutical package; especially proposals aimed at combating the counterfeiting of medicines, and pharmacovigilance.

Also, at an international level, the Belgian Presidency will ensure preparation and coordination of the European of the Conference of the Parties on the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

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