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EU News

European Partnership for Action Against Cancer

The European Commission is launching a European Partnership for Action Against Cancer, planned for 2009 - 2013 to support Member States and other stakeholders in their efforts to tackle cancer more efficiently by providing a framework for identifying and sharing information, capacity and expertise in cancer prevention and control. It aims to engage a wide range of stakeholders across the EU with a common commitment to addressing cancer and to avoid scattered actions and duplication of efforts, and contribute to better use of limited resources available. By the end of the partnership, the objective is for all Member States to have integrated cancer plans. The longterm aim set out by the communication is to reduce cancer by 15% by 2020.

Work of the Partnership

The adopted "Communication Action Against Cancer : European Partnership" broadly sets out the objectives for the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer. It is intended that the partnership will itself determine its own key areas and actions. Identified possible key areas and actions to be further taken forward by the partnership include:

- Prevention (health promotion and early detection);
- Identification and promotion of good practice in cancer-related healthcare;
- Priorities for cancer research, and
- Health information, collection and analysis of comparable data.

The work of the partnership is proposed to be undertaken in multistakeholder working groups (based on the four areas of action, identified above), which will either undertake the identified areas of work directly or monitor work to be conducted by outside actors, institutions or organisations, as appropriate. A steering group will coordinate the activities of the stakeholder working groups, which will report to the partnership secretariat and during an annual open forum.

In order to take forward these identified areas and actions, the partnership will be based on a specific joint action supported by the health programme. Joint action is a specific mechanism established under the health programme and refers to activities carried out by the Community and Member States or competent authorities. In addition, through the health programme, the Commission aims to provide additional technical support, including administrative and scientific support, to the stakeholder working groups.

Parliamentary Campaign to Safeguard Future Use of fMRI

Two leading MEPs, together with prominent healthcare professionals and leading European patient groups will launch a Parliamentary campaign to safeguard the future use of fMRI scanners. In early 2010 the European Parliament and Council will be sent a proposal from the European Commission to amend Directive 2004/40/EC on electromagnetic fields. This revision is as a result of the concerns raised by the Alliance for MRI and recognition by the EU institutions that the Directive severely curtails the use of MRI to the detriment of patients in Europe.

Founding members of the Alliance for MRI, the European Society of Radiology (ESR) and the European Federation of Neurological Associations (EFNA), will call on members of the newly elected European Parliament to support a derogation for all uses of MRI from the exposure limits set in the EU Physical Agents Directive 2004/40/EC (EMF).

The exposure limits in the Directive have now been proven to be detrimental to patient care, most notably restricting and limiting the use of MRI in interventional applications and in imaging vulnerable patients and children where closer patient contact is required. Furthermore, new research and developments in MRI will be severely restricted as will routine cleaning and maintenance of MRI equipment.

European Commission Tackles Health Inequalities

Despite increased prosperity and overall improvements in European health, differences between and within countries persist and in some cases are increasing. The European Commission has therefore announced a series of actions to help tackle gaps in health between and within countries in the EU. Differences in life expectancy at birth between Member States are up to eight years for women and 14 years for men.

The reasons are complex and involve a wide range of factors from income, education, living and working conditions, health behaviours to access to healthcare. A possible consequence of the current financial crisis is that this health gap will increase in the groups most hit by the recession such as the unemployed. The Commission initiative identifies action for improving knowledge on this issue, better monitoring and data collection and more assessment of how EU policies can tackle health inequalities and work with countries, regions and stakeholders.

"I want to see a Europe where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy a high level of health, regardless of where they live or their social or ethnic background. Today, we have recognised that health inequalities need to be tackled. This requires a cross-sectoral policy approach at EU, national, regional and local levels," said Androulla Vassiliou, EU Commissioner for Health. The EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimir Spidla adds: "It is vital that the EU plays its role in protecting the health of the whole population, but particularly the most vulnerable".

Action on Health Inequalities

Closing health gaps means helping those regions and populations with less good health to make faster improvements in order catch up. This requires that more attention is given to the needs of less advantaged people - for example in the provision of health services, the design of health promotion and protection activities, or improvements in living and working conditions.

The EU will support Member States and stakeholders to identify what works best and how to put this into practice. It will produce regular statistics and reporting on the size of inequalities in the EU and on successful strategies to reduce them. It will strengthen its procedures to evaluate the impact of its policies on health inequalities and help reduce them where possible. It will help countries to use EU funds to improve the health of the worst off and narrow health gaps between regions – such as primary care facilities, water and sanitation and housing renewal. A first report on progress will be produced in 2012.

Inequalities Found in all EU Countries

Inequalities in health are found in all EU countries, and between them. For example, infant mortality ranges from around three per 1000 live births to more than 10 per 1000. Huge differences in health also exist between social groups across the EU and within Member States. People with a lower level of education, a lower occupational class or a lower level of income, tend to die at a younger age and to have a higher prevalence of most types of health problems.

Many of these differences are due to avoidable factors such as negative impacts on health of social and economic conditions, quality of work, environment quality and quantity of social and health service provision, as well as health related behaviours such as smoking, drinking and poor or inadequate diet.

Together for Health Strategy

Reducing inequalities in health is a key action in the Commission's health strategy, called 'Together for Health'. An EU expert group on social determinants and health inequalities, established in 2006, has been examining the issue and provided important input into the development of today's Solidarity in Health initiative. From February to April 2009, an open consultation on tackling inequalities in health was carried out. The results of the consultation also contributed to this initiative. The Community health programme also co-funds several projects in the field of reducing inequalities in health. Through the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion EU Member States have committed themselves to reducing inequalities in access to healthcare and health outcome.

Further Reading

- http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics/socio_economics_en.htm
- http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics/documents/com2009_background_en.pdf

EU Criticised Over Online Medicines

European politicians are criticising the EU's decision not to legislate against online pharmacies, claiming that it is a huge omission in the plans to combat counterfeit medicines. German MEP Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, said that the online trade in fake medicines is a growing illegal business that needs to be addressed.

The EU 'pharma package' of legislation unveiled in December 2008 in Brussels, focused on three priority areas including protecting the European market from counterfeit medicines, improving pharmacovigilance to reduce the adverse effects of medicine and improving information for patients on prescription medicines.

The World Health Organisation say that 80% of counterfeit medicines come from the internet but the directive failed to mention how to combat

the sale of counterfeit drugs online.

For more information, please visit

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/pharmaceuticals/pharmacos/pharmpack_en.htm

Commission Launches Youth Health Initiative

The initiative, launched by European Commissioner for Health Androulla Vassiliou, encourages more young people to become actively involved in developing EU health policies. It was kickstarted with a conference on youth health in Brussels in July allowing over 200 young people to meet with policymakers and health organisations and debate key health issues with them. Topics included alcohol, tobacco, drugs, mental health and physical activity and the financial crisis, inequalities in health, education and the role of the media.

Ms.Vassiliou said: "Even though the health of young people in Europe is better than it has ever been, there are worrying signs that far too many young people adopt behaviours which, in the long term, will reduce their ability to lead healthy and productive lives, thus endangering their future. My aim is to motivate the youth of today to care about their health, engage with policymakers and speak out on health matters."

The aims of the Youth Health Initiative are to involve young people more closely in EU health policies, strengthen youth partnership in the decision making process, involve other sectors across EU policy areas and at national level on the implementation of prevention programmes targeted at young people and support Member States' activities on the health of young people. For more information, please visit <http://health.europa.eu/youth>

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