

## Volume 8, Issue 3 /2006 - News

### Europe

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#### ECJ Judgement on Hospital Treatment

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) recently issued a judgement in the Yvonne Watts versus Bedford Primary Care Trust case. It announced that the "obligation to assume the costs of hospital treatment in another Member State is equally valid for a national health service which freely offers a similar treatment". Yvonne Watts, a British woman suffering from arthritis of the hip, asked for permission from Bedford PCT to be operated on abroad, given the long waiting lists. A specialist doctor examined Mrs Watts and classified her among the "routine cases" which could be treated on the spot at the appropriate time. After her situation worsened and she was promised an operation within a period of three to four months, Mrs. Watts decided to have the operation in France and, out of her own pocket, paid for the placement of a new hip-joint (£ 3.900). She applied to the High Court of Justice to claim the reimbursement of costs incurred, in vain. Finally, the Court of Appeal referred to the ECJ, who decided that the case entered into the field of action of regulations on the free movement of services.

#### Agreement Reached on Services Directive

Surprisingly, European competition ministers have agreed on a compromise with regard to the Services Directive. The European Parliament will adopt the much debated Directive before the summer holidays, with a large majority since the deputy conservatives rallied the social democrats to their way of thinking. The agreement presented provides that it will be henceforth easier for service providers to work and set up subsidiaries all over the EU, but that the labour law in force will be that of the host country and not that of the country of origin. Principally excluded from the Directive are services of public utility (e.g. medical establishments, nursing activities, distribution of water, etc.). After adoption by the European Parliament, the new Directive will be transposed into national law no later than 2010.

#### Learning about Health Via a Simple Click

The European Commission has opened its new "EU health portal". Here, citizens of the Union will be able to find answers to their questions on health policy. The portal gives access to simple information and 47 themes have already been confirmed, ranging from the health of newborns to hospitals in the EU. The site includes more than 400,000 links to reliable sources. The portal could also be an important tool for decision-makers and experts in the health professions, to publicise the latest developments in research.

#### European Institute of Technology

Following intensive consultation, the European Commission explained in detail its plan for the creation of the European Institute of Technology (EIT). The EIT should represent excellence in the fields of training, research and innovation. The President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, stated: "The EIT will become a model of excellence at European level". The Commission will present an official proposal in this direction before the end of the year. The EIT's Board of Directors will be at the heart of the concept and will draw up scientific projects in the fields of interdisciplinary action (bioenergy or nanotechnology). "Partnerships of competence", composed of universities, research institutes and companies should be selected on a competitive basis, in order to achieve the missions relating to research, training and innovation.

#### EU Regulates Medicines for Children

The Council and the Parliament finally came to an agreement on a regulation regarding paediatric medicines. Françoise Grossetête, rapporteur of the proposal, announced that this regulation will bring justice to the interests of children. The proposal envisages a whole series of obligations, stimulants and protection measures. For example, before any request for approval, data on the use of the medicine on children must be supplied in the framework of guaranteed paediatric tests. A new type of approval is also planned, namely the approval of medicines for paediatric use, which guarantees data protection for ten years as an innovation compared with unpatented medicines.

#### Needle Stick Injuries:

##### EU Parliament Calls for Amended Directive

In a second report on surgical needle injuries, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament called on the Commission to amend the existing Directive 2000/54/EC on the protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents at work). The report by Stephen Hughes, (PES, UK) points out that needle injuries can lead to contamination by 20 deadly viruses, such as Hepatitis B and C or HIV/Aids. Especially medical staff are vulnerable but also non-medical staff in hospitals run the risk of injury.

These injuries can be reduced by implementing regular training and organisational measures as well as the use of safer working practices and medical devices.

Throughout Europe, there is an escalating shortage of healthcare professionals. Various studies have shown that occupational safety risks present in the workplace are a contributing factor why healthcare as a career is not deemed attractive. Therefore, the Commission has been called upon to formulate standard EU guidelines for reporting and identification of needle injuries.

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