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### Initial Information on Planned EU Action on Healthcare Services

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Following its Consultation from early 2007, the Commission now is preparing its action on healthcare services and crossborder healthcare.

In recent years these issues have been discussed widely at European level and the Commission has recognised the need to address current uncertainties about the application of Community law to health services, and to provide support for efforts to improve effectiveness, efficiency, quality and safety of national health systems. Also health ministers have welcomed the Commission's initiative and endorsed the need for action.

The planned EU action, which is to be tabled very shortly is likely to be a package of legislative and non-legislative measures, a directive and a communication. The Commission together with representatives from Member States is drawing up a list of highly specialised and expensive services, for which in case of a cross-border performance in a hospital a prior authorisation of the payment provider would be needed. For non-hospital care, no such authorisation would be required.

Also planned are extensive information rights for patients as well as the duty to inform from service providers and member states. The latter would have to set up "patient information centres", that would support patients from abroad to find the right service provider and in case of potential damage claims.

At the European Health Forum in Bad Hofgastein, Markos Kyprianou also gave some insight: "We should therefore aim to reduce inequalities and disparities between regions by enabling interaction and cooperation between different health systems. Health technology assessment is a good example, where it is more efficient for everyone to collaborate on assessing new health technologies rather than duplicating assessments across the Member States.

A clear framework at EU level would also provide clarity for healthcare purchasers and health insurers to take full advantage of expertise in other Member States, such as through European networks of centres of reference."

Next to this initiative, the Commission is planning two further specific initiatives in 2008 – one on patient safety and another on a health workforce in Europe, the Commissioner said.

In all cases, the benchmark should remain what works in practice for patients, physicians, hospitals and for health systems as a whole, he finished.

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