

Volume 13, Issue 1/2011 - Editorial

New Chapters Begin

2011 presents itself as a year of changes. Two changes deserve a place in this editorial.

After several years of exclusion of healthcare from the general Services Directive, the European Parliament voted on January 19th in favour of the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross- Border Healthcare.

This Directive is a very important step in aligning the rulings by the European Court of Justice on cross-border care (Kohll & Decker et al.) and setting up a legal framework for patients wishing to cross borders for care.

It will allow to clarify the patients' rights and put in place a mechanism to avoid, as far as possible, that patients have to pay upfront for the transnational healthcare they receive. In principle, no prior approval from the home state is needed in order to be reimbursed. But the Member States can require prior authorisation in some particular cases. To avoid "health tourism", patients will only be reimbursed at home-country rates. Patients should have a copy of their medical records.

It foresees a contact point in each Member State, working together in a European reference network and providing practical information to patients on conditions and levels of reimbursement, possible treatments, providers, procedures for redress so that patients have a clearer idea on the quality and safety of healthcare provided abroad, which will lead to more informed decisions on cross-border healthcare. It also supports the development of "European Reference Networks" bringing together, on a voluntary basis, specialised centres of expertise already recognised in Europe. Furthermore, the setup of a voluntary network connecting national authorities responsible for e-health is included in this directive, as well as a similar network in the field of HTA.

The Member States have 30 months to integrate these measures into national legislation. There are still issues for debate (e.g. principle of prior authorisation, Cooperation on e-health and HTA).

This directive will have an impact, not only on patients, health professionals and health systems but also on us, health managers.

Our subcommittee on European Affairs will follow this topic and welcomes any vision and input from colleagues around Europe. (E)Hospital will communicate on this in the next issues.

This brings me to the second point I want to share with you. As communicated already, a new Editorial Board (EB) has been established since the last General Assembly. I have the honour of succeeding Mr. Heinz Kölking as President of the EB. The members of the EB will be working together to ensure that the latest developments and important issues for European hospital directors are covered in the journal and that these meet with the new objectives of the EAHM.

I would also like to take this opportunity to invite our readers and national organisations to propose topics, news and other important themes by contacting the Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief. We are happy to follow your ideas and interests and consider them in future issues.

This issue's cover story focuses on the legal issues in today's hospitals. Other articles include Innovation in Denmark and to coincide with the Hungarian Presidency of the European Union Council we include a Hungarian country focus.

With this issue you will also find a special pharmacy section informing you of the latest trends in hospital pharmacy.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Published on : Tue, 29 Mar 2011