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News Europe

Healthcare Associated Infections Cost Europe 5.5 Billion Euros per year

A round table on patient safety and healthcare associated infections (HCAIs) organised by Health First Europe and cohosted by MEPs Liz Lynne and Amalia Sartori revealed the extent of the burden of HCAIs on Europe's healthcare systems.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) claims that HCAIs cause 37,000 deaths per year and contribute to a further 110,000 deaths across the EU. The result of these infections is an additional 16 million days of hospital stays per year and a cost of 5.5 billion euros per year. This is an enormous burden and if it continues, could cause serious problems regarding the sustainability of healthcare systems in the EU.

MEP Liz Lynne highlighted the need for the exchange of best practice among member states and hopes that the incidence of HCAIs can be reduced by 40% by 2015. Everyone was in agreement that creating clear targets, set guidelines and co-operation between member states is the next logical step. Future actions could include the use of rapid PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) MRSA testing on admission to hospital.

Health-e-child (www.health-e-child.org)

The Health-e-child project is an integrated healthcare platform for European pediatrics. Today there is a demand for the integration and exploitation of biomedical information to improve clinical practice, medical research, and personalise healthcare for EU citizens. Health-e-child's aim is to integrate traditional and emerging sources of biomedical information and therefore provide uninhibited access to universal biomedical knowledge for personalised and preventive healthcare, large-scale information- based biomedical research and training, and informed policy making.

The platform will allow a comprehensive view of a child's health by vertically integrating biomedical data, information, and knowledge. The focus is on individualised disease prevention, screening, early diagnosis, therapy and follow-up of pediatric heart diseases, inflammatory diseases, and brain tumours. The project will build a Grid-enabled European network of leading clinical centres that will share and annotate biomedical data, validate systems clinically, and diffuse clinical excellence across Europe by setting up new technologies, clinical workflows, and standards.

ENISA Analyses Risks of e-Health

ENISA (The European Network and Information Security Agency) has issued a report presenting major potential Emerging and Future Risks (EFR) concerning remote health monitoring. The report comes after an EFR assessment based on scenario building and analysis. The e-health scenario was developed and analysed by an international group of interdisciplinary experts.

The report identifies 14 risks including breaches of data protection legislation, mission creep (meaning secondary use of data), intrusive data surveillance and profiling by insurance companies, employers, credit-checking companies, etc, data loss or theft, system failures and service disruption. And the general conclusion is that a cautionary approach to e-health applications is the best option. "Caution seems to be the prudent answer at this point: the benefits are clear, but also the risks entailed cannot be ignored".

World Health Day: Save Lives. Make Hospitals Safe in Emergencies

Tuesday the 7th of April was World Health Day. This year's focus was on the safety of healthcare facilities and the readiness of health workers who treat those affected by emergencies. The World Health Organization and its international partners have been emphasising the importance of investing in health infrastructure to cope with emergencies and ensure the continuity of care.

To mark World Health Day, European Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou visited several community health projects in Kenya on 6 and 7 April. Commissioner Vassiliou taped a video message recalling the close links between health and productivity and the need to foster good health, especially in vulnerable groups, in particular in these times of economic crisis.

Improving Mental Health Awareness

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety is calling on Member States to develop awarenessraising campaigns, to combat stigma and social exclusion and to improve mental health legislation. The report calls for more up-to-date mental health legislation in line with international human rights. It also calls for a better awareness of good mental health, specifically targeting healthcare professionals, teachers, parents and employers.

For these initiatives the EU should use the funding facilities available through the Seventh Framework Programme and also the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

European Patients' Rights Day

For the Third Year Running, on the 18th of April European Patients'

Rights Day was celebrated. It is an occasion for Member states to inform, discuss and make commitments to improve patients' rights in Europe. The closing event included a conference, Patients Rights: A growing European concern and framework for action, held in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 22 April with the participation of the EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou.

Created by the Active Citizenship Network, European Patients' Rights Day launches a series of national, regional and local events across Europe with the aim of informing and discussing patients' rights and empowerment. ACN together with a group of European citizens organisations in 2002 established a European Charter of Patients' Rights, which includes the following 14 rights: the right to preventive measures; access; information; consent; free choice; privacy and confidentiality; respect of patients' time; observance of quality standards; safety; innovation; avoidance of unnecessary suffering and pain; personalised treatment; to complain; to receive compensation. All these rights, based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, are fundamental in relation to European citizens and healthcare services.

In order to reinforce these rights the commitment and cooperation of healthcare stakeholders in every EU country is needed. It is believed that celebrating European Patients' Rights Day every year contributes to this goal.

Draft Directive on Cross-Border Healthcare Adopted

Parliament has approved plans to give Europeans the right to seek healthcare abroad more easily and for the costs to be reimbursed. The draft report on cross-border healthcare by John Bowis was adopted by 297 votes to 120 with 152 abstentions.

The aim of the draft directive is to remove the obstacles for patients seeking treatment in another EU Member State and to allow the cost of this treatment to be reimbursed. The draft also stresses the need for high quality, safe and efficient healthcare and that healthcare cooperation mechanisms must be developed among Member States.

The legislation is about patient mobility, not the free movement of service providers and MEPs are keen to stress that the directive does not mean an encroachment on national powers. It has been agreed that patients are to be reimbursed up to the level they would have received in their home country. Also, considering the proposed rules would mean that patients would have to pay in advance and be reimbursed later, a provision was added allowing Member States to offer a system of voluntary prior notification.

Finally, the draft directive also calls for better information on all major aspects of such care including the level of reimbursement and the right of redress in the event of medical error. National contact points should also be established for complaints, as should a European Patients Ombudsman.

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