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### News Europe

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

Following consultations, the Commission is preparing its action on healthcare services and cross-border healthcare. These issues have been discussed widely at the European level and the Commission has recognized 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. Health ministers have welcomed the Commission's initiative and endorsed the need for action. The planned EU action, which is to be tabled shortly is likely to be a package of legislative and non-legislative measures, including 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 those services, in the case of cross-border performance in a hospital, a prior authorisation from the payment provider would be needed. For nonhospital care, no such authorisation would be required.

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

At the European Health Forum in Bad Hofgastein (see further), Markos Kyprianou highlighted some goals: "We should 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 member states. A clear framework at the 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."

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.

#### Second Programme of Community Action in the Field of Health

On 9 October, the Council adopted a decision establishing a second programme of action in the field of health. Ministers approved all amendments from the European Parliament in second reading.

The programme is established for the period from 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2013 on the basis of a budget of 321,5 million euros. The objectives are: improvement of citizens' health security; promotion of health, including the reduction of health inequalities; and generation and dissemination health information and knowledge.

To ensure full participation in the programme by organisations that promote a health agenda in line with the programme objectives, a wider variety of financing mechanisms are offered. These include:

- cofinancing of projects intended to achieve a programme objective,
- tendering actions to achieve a programme objective;
- cofinancing of the operating costs of a non-governmental organisation or a specialised network;
- joint financing of a public body or NGO by the Community and one or more member state;
- joint actions with other

Community programmes, which will generate coherence between this instrument and other Community programmes.

The Health Programme 2008-2013 is intended to complement, support and add value to the policies of the member states and contribute to increased solidarity and prosperity in the European Union by protecting and promoting human health and safety and by improving public health on the whole.

#### **10 Years Gastein – Shaping the Future of Health**

At its 10th anniversary, the European Health Forum Gastein has been established more than ever as an international health policy platform, which plays a key role in the preparation and presentation of new activities. The event, which took place this year in Bad Hofgastein from 3 to 6 October, was the most important health policy event in the EU. More than 600 high profile experts took part in nearly 30 individual events. One of the key events was the session on planned EU actions in healthcare. Leading EU experts and member states involved in drawing up these measures had the opportunity to meet at Gastein in order to discuss the Commission's recommendations immediately prior to the expected closure of proceedings.

A second key topic was to support innovation and to stabilise key areas. The continuously increasing numbers of patients and rising costs demand new medical and organisational approaches to the treatment of chronic diseases, in particular diabetes. New technological innovations, as well as new forms of care will be necessary to stabilise these key areas of European health services for the future. New care models outdated structures and permanently change the care of the chronically ill. Experts hence presented numerous successful examples of innovative solutions in a push to implement them across Europe.

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