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News Members

France

Commission Report on Hospital Missions

In April, Gérard Larcher and the 22 other members of the commission appointed by the President turned in their final report. Their work started six months before and their task revolved around a formulation of hospital missions. 16 proposals have been articulated in order to better organise hospitals and energise public hospitals.

The commission recommends the creation of territorial hospital communities, and the elaboration of public service contracts. The status of hospitals should also be modernised. The hospital director should be the ultimate decision-maker for hospital management, which would enable a more reactive management in cooperation with the other hospital managers.

Territorial hospital communities would allow public hospitals to merge, based on common medical activities. Financial incentives would be put in place and the whole project reviewed after 2 years. Private for profit hospitals would also benefit from a new contractual framework for taking on public hospital services. Financial accessibility would be guaranteed.

As far as hospital personnel is concerned, the status of hospital doctors would be amended, in order to take their activity into account to calculate their remuneration. This would make hospitals more attractive to doctors, as compared to private clinics which offer better pay.

Public hospitals would become more flexible and autonomous in order to improve performances.

All these measures would enable hospitals to be financially sound as of 2012. These proposals might serve as a basis for the bill which should be presented by the Minister of Health in the fall.

South Korea

The new Asian medical travel hub? After building its economy on semiconductors, ships and steel, South Korea is touting its surgeons' skills in the beauty business to carve out a new niche. Helped by active government support, a boom in cosmetic surgery and a pool of experienced surgeons, the country wants to surpass Singapore, Thailand and India to become Asia's new medical tourism hub. The Korean Minister of Health has recently stated that the government would step up efforts to win parliamentary approval of a bill that would legalise profit-oriented medical brokerages linking hospitals and patients.

Hospitals have set an ambitious goal of 100,000 foreign patients annually by 2012. In March last year, 36 hospitals and state agencies formed the Council for Korean Medicine Overseas Promotion (CKMP) to tap the fast-growing market.

Belgium

A thousand future doctors saved by the Minister of Health Laurette Onkelinx, the new Belgian Minister of Health, is going to publish a royal decree allowing all medical graduates, without exception, to practice medicine.

Since 2004, the *numerus clausus* established in 1997 limited to 700 a year the number of Belgian medical graduates who were legally allowed to practice medicine.

Until now, about a thousand students were thus considered as 'surplus'. This situation will be corrected through a spreading of the excess over a number of years instead of a strict application of yearly quotas.

United Kingdom

Hospitals are using marketing techniques for the first time

The National Health Service (NHS) may soon and for the first time use marketing tools for its various services.

Medical success stories must also be made public by hospitals, within an appropriate framework, and marketing expenses must, according to the directive, be "proportional".

Until now, hospitals were not allowed to canvass patients directly. But since patients, as of April, may for the first time freely choose their hospital and specialist, a liberalisation of marketing regulations was in order, as Minister in charge Johnson argued.

Germany

Many health establishments are facing insolvency. The German association of hospital directors (VKD, Verband der Krankenhausdirektoren Deutschlands) has expressed its concern over massive closures of German hospitals. According to indications from its president, Heinz Kölking, the capping of budgets should be lifted urgently and hospitals should clearly be awarded additional funding.

The unjustifiable stabilisation levy, which hospitals are now paying to health insurance to the amount of 300 million euros per year, should also disappear. If nothing is done, several hundreds of health establishments might have to close down within the next five years. Some hospitals have already had to transfer their property in order to be able to survive financially.

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