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Our Hospitals and the Crisis

The future of health establishments is one of the overriding preoccupations on the minds of all European citizens. This issue transcends the differences in models of care organisation throughout Europe. For many it is astonishing to realise that this question was almost completely ignored in the recent debates preceding the European Parliamentary elections even though there is no shortage of topics for discussion. If it is true that the hospital sector is still an area that the European authorities show little interest in, so numerous are the common problems that deserve attention and solutions, a communal European analysis is at least a starting point as these issues go beyond national frameworks.

There is also the question of the effects of the crisis on our hospitals. The period we are currently experiencing raises the question of which methods to adopt within our respective establishments to overcome this crisis, or rather, these crises. Actually, the word crisis takes on several meanings which are all challenges facing our hospitals:

First of all the crisis of the hospital model itself, which echoes throughout Europe during passionate debates on the most effective and efficient way to organise care. Although health systems differ considerably throughout Europe, the questions are the same concerning the suitability of choices made in the past as are the concerns about the capacity of the systems in place to overcome these difficulties.

Next, the economic and social crisis. No country in the European Union has been spared from the fundamental question of the economic stability of their model. Everywhere social deficits are widening, raising with intensity the question of the durability of organisations and of social welfare.

Likewise the financial crisis, which, far from being solely limited to the economic sector, has hit our establishments head on. The huge slowing down of activity that we have been experiencing for almost one year presents serious dangers to the financial health of hospitals: A marked increase in public deficit, difficulty in obtaining loans, reticence to invest in structuring projects, insufficient liquid assets... The list could be considerably longer and most issues are common across Europe proving that a European level discussion would be beneficial.

Finally, health crises, which our hospitals have already faced numerous times during their rich history, now take on a new dimension due to globalisation. Therefore the flu pandemic, which should hit the continent this autumn, will again put health institutions on the front line. Across Europe, these institutions are actively preparing to accommodate and take care of the population; offer them the best adapted care and therefore constitute an essential link in state organisation and national solidarity.

Crisis, a single word with several realities but at each time the same result, the extraordinary capacity of our hospitals to adapt and the force of values they embody: Solidarity, protecting those who are the weakest and the constant commitment to persevere despite the difficulties.

At a time when Europe seems to be searching for meaning, we can wager that these values will inspire them and allow them to give European citizens a common vision of their future.

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