
Study Reveals 80% of Doctors fear the Way They Will be Treated in Their Old Age

In a new study from the Economist Intelligence Unit on healthcare provision for an ageing population, supported by Pfizer, the overwhelming majority of health professionals surveyed (80%) express their concern about how they will be treated when they grow old. They are indeed sceptical that current policies to address demographic shift caused by an ageing population are comprehensive, realistic or sufficiently funded to address future demand. The outlook is not entirely pessimistic, however: while 49% of survey respondents claim that ageing is a threat to the viability of their countries' national healthcare systems, 50% believe it provides the opportunity for broader healthcare reforms which are needed anyway.

Based on responses from more than 1,000 healthcare professionals across Europe and interviews with 22 international experts on ageing, the report, entitled *A New Vision for Old Age: Rethinking Health Policy for Europe's Ageing Society*, concludes that there is an urgent need to rethink the way healthcare is provided to older people.

The study examines the leading challenges, as well as opportunities, presented by the ageing of societies in Europe, and some of the steps countries may take in response. The key findings of the report are:

- Smarter investment should focus on preventive healthcare as this could reduce the prevalence of chronic illness, which increases as we get older. The main recommendation made by 46% of medical professionals in the survey is for governments to prioritise making citizens responsible for their own health.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on better integration of health and social care: only 38% of respondents feel their country is good at this.
- Medical training should focus on the future healthcare needs of ageing populations to meet the challenge of chronic disease more efficiently. 27% of respondents see a shortage of primary care workers as one of the top challenges facing their healthcare systems, and 20% say the same in regard to secondary care workers. The training of health professionals is not currently geared to the evolving needs of healthcare systems, in particular the integrated care which elderly patients with more than one chronic condition require.
- Negative attitudes towards older people need to be challenged: 42% of respondents view the attitudes of healthcare staff as a major barrier to the provision of better care for the elderly, and more than one-half also say that older patients are less likely to have their complaints given full attention than younger people.

The recommendations from the report outline specific strategies that policymakers could adopt now to help ensure that population ageing is managed in a sustainable way:

1. Population interventions to maintain good health should be used more widely. These can increase healthy life expectancy and delay the onset of disability and chronic disease.
2. The introduction and uptake of innovative technologies such as remote monitoring, telemedicine and new treatments that require fewer visits to the doctor should be encouraged to help older people remain independent for longer: the key to managing chronic disease centres around assisting affected individuals to live healthy, independent lives within the community.
3. Health and social care providers should be encouraged to provide integrated patient-centred care, empowering patients to stay healthier.
4. Specialised educational training in the needs of older people should be put in place for all healthcare professionals.
5. Increasing retirement ages and more flexible working patterns could help to increase workforce participation and keep people healthier as they work longer.

Neelie Kroes, the Vice-President of the European Commission, said: "We see population ageing as being not only a challenge but a formidable opportunity for innovation and growth in Europe as it forces us to adopt new models such as for health and social care and to invest in technologies, tools and skills to help older people stay healthy and active members of society."

Iain Scott, Managing Editor at the EIU, said: "Europe as a whole is wrestling with the challenges of an ageing population. What is clear from our research is that healthcare professionals lack confidence in current policies to such an extent that they fear for their own future care as they age. This report reveals the fundamental steps that healthcare professionals believe will lead to an improved future not just for older people but for society as a whole."

Richard Torbett, Senior Director of International Affairs at Pfizer said: "This research underlines the need for everyone involved in healthcare to put preparedness for ageing at the centre of their planning for the future. Healthcare professionals are delivering a clear message that prioritising the right investments now—in preventive health, training and service integration—can put us in a position to manage the transition to an older society sustainably and cost-effectively. But these are some of the very activities most under threat from austerity."

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