



EU Patient and Workplace Safety

Paul De Raeve, RN, RGN, MSc, MQA, Mphil/PhD

EFN Secretary General

President INGO Council of Europe Health Grouping

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) has patient safety high on its professional agenda. Although the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the World Health Organisation have developed patient safety recommendations, the political commitment is crucial, but real progress can only be achieved when policies are development based on qualitative evidence to put a human face to policies.

The risk of acquiring a healthcare associated infection is faced by employees, contractors, visitors, patients and others who may have cause to enter healthcare establishments. This means that as well as being personally at risk, they risk transmitting the infection to others. This is one of many occupational risks connected with the transmission of infections and regular screening and effective preventative measures are critically important. Patients and their relatives need to be provided with clear information about healthcare associated infections, the risks and preventative measures they can take to mitigate their chance of spreading/picking up healthcare associated infections when they receive healthcare. Therefore a process to collate and disseminate comprehensive information to assist patients in making an informed decision regarding their choice of healthcare need to be put in place.

Furthermore, it is estimated that there are more than one million injuries to health care staff with used needles and other medical sharps each year. If suffering an injury from a contaminated 'sharp', the risk of transmission of

infections is 1 in 3 workers for hepatitis B, 1 in 30 for hepatitis C and 1 in 300 for HIV 6. Next to the considerable physical and mental suffering, infections and injuries have an impact on the daily workforce planning and the working conditions of 6 million nurses in Europe. Therefore, it is important that the proven prevention measures that can protect all workers in the health care system from blood-borne infections due to occupational injuries from contaminated needles are urgently and consistently implemented, as has been requested by the European Parliament more than one year ago. Europe's nurses remain disappointed and confused about the all too common lack of willingness to provide them with a basic level of protection from these very serious occupational injuries. Although understanding better the factors causing healthcare associated infections and injuries, a more effective surveillance, reporting system and networking is urgently needed to face the serious challenges of the national healthcare systems across Europe. Practitioners and policy-makers need to have information on the quality of the services, the safeguards in place and the mechanisms to address complaints.

Equally, healthcare workers need to be kept informed of the latest healthcare associated infections mitigation techniques through continuous professional development. Competent professionals are paramount to delivering effective healthcare and the European Social Cohesion Structural Funds need to be employed to develop continuous professional development programs. Implementing modules in patient safety as a

core part of health education are concrete and simple steps, but they make a huge difference.

Finally, pan-European leadership and co-ordination from the European Commission in co-operation with the Member States is urgently needed. There is a great deal of expertise in Europe and examples of best practice that need to be effectively assessed,



communicated and their urgent adoption actively encouraged. A meaningful stakeholder approach involving nurses in all phases of health policy-making is therefore essential to secure the health care outcomes in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and equity.

To conclude, a stakeholder approach in policy-making is critical to achieve safer working practices throughout the enlarged European Union. Better education and information of healthcare workers on the risks of exposure, prevention and effective incident reporting is key for achieving a transparent health care system where quality of care and patient safety are central.



EFN
Clos du Parnasse, 11A
1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 512 74 19
Fax: +32 2 512 35 50
Email: efn@efn.be
Web: www.efnweb.eu