

RESPONSE BY THE INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR HEALTH PROMOTION & EDUCATION TO THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES REGARDING COMMUNITY ACTION ON HEALTH SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

This response has been prepared on behalf of the European Regional Committee of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE). IUHPE is a democratically constituted, global membership, non-governmental organisation of individuals, associations and institutions, committed to improving health through the advancement of health promotion and health education. Founded in 1951, based in France, and comprising around 2000 members, its goals are to advance theoretical knowledge, professional skills, effective practice, and high quality research in health promotion.

One of six IUHPE administrative regions across the globe, the European Region (IUHPE/Euro) is geographically defined by the boundaries of WHO/EURO. IUHPE/Euro organises the European region-based work of IUHPE's 300+ European members, through elected regional officers and a regional committee. The IUHPE has members in all 25 EU member states.

Further details of IUHPE's mission, organisation and activities - including major projects on health promotion effectiveness undertaken in partnership with the European Commission - can be found at www.iuhpe.org and at www.hp-source.net

WELCOME

The IUHPE welcomes the Commission's intention to develop a Community framework for safe, high quality and efficient health services, by reinforcing cooperation among Member States and providing certainty over the application of Community law to health services and health care.

Because the IUHPE is primarily concerned with the promotion of health and the prevention of disease, this response refers to those parts of the Commission's communication which seem pertinent to these issues.

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

At 2.2, the question is raised of defining shared values and principles for health services on which citizens could rely throughout the EU, and the practical consequences of doing so.

Recognising that the EU has already affirmed its commitment to the value of the health of all EU citizens, through the pursuit of policies across all sectors of society, the IUHPE considers that an important implication of this shared value is to establish the principle of setting high standards for the promotion of health and the prevention of disease throughout the Community. The practical consequences of this would be the use of Community instruments to define and progressively raise the standards of effectiveness of health promotion and disease prevention practice in all Member States.

The movement of a substantial and growing proportion of the EU workforce among Member States adds complexity and urgency to this challenge. Currently, for example, many workers are being denied health promotion through their deficiencies in the languages of their host countries, while others find that essential, inexpensive disease prevention services, which are routine in their countries of origin, are either not properly communicated, not available, or provided to an unsatisfactory standard.

There are also widespread failings to meet the challenges of providing appropriate, comprehensible, culturally sensitive, information to patients, and of promoting patient self-care and empowerment, based on well-articulated principles of health literacy which have long been at the heart of health promotion practice.

Response to question 1

It is important to ensure that co-operation actions among Member States, and actions by the Community, are commensurate in scale with: a) existing and evolving problems, and b) the Community's main responsibilities, in the field of public health, health promotion and disease prevention; and also to ensure that such actions are sufficiently resourced to achieve their objectives.

AREAS OF POSSIBLE COMMUNITY ACTION

Responses to question 6

1. Meeting the needs of EU citizens for high standards of effectiveness of health promotion practice has for many of years been the subject of concerted actions within the European health promotion field. The IUHPE has played a pioneering role and continues to be a leading player in this field. The Commission has provided, and continues to provide, important support to these endeavours.

An important next step in meeting the needs of EU citizens, is to ensure that the free movement of health promotion practitioners across the Community is supported by high common standards. To achieve this necessitates defining and agreeing on:

- a) the essential core competencies and professional standards necessary to become accredited to practise effective, evidence-based health promotion, and
- b) the requirements for academic and in-service training needed to achieve those professional standards.

A working group of the IUHPE European Regional Committee which has been examining competencies, professional standards, training and accreditation, in health promotion in Europe, has made significant progress, and will be willing to work with others to bring this work to an applicable conclusion

2. An important issue not addressed in the Communication is the potential problems attendant on the need for health care service providers to share information regarding health care service users. This issue must be considered seriously, and actions need to be taken that will ensure that the basic rights of patient confidentiality and information security are protected right across the Community.

3. Because it is a primary responsibility of health care provision, as far as possible to protect the population from harm, measures are required to develop and ensure rapid information exchange among Member States about actual, or suspected, problematic service providers.

Responses to Question 8:

1. Since 1998, the Commission has given support to the development and sharing of the knowledge bases for evidence-based health promotion practice and - to some extent - for the definition of the systems characteristics and infrastructures that are needed for effective and sustainable implementation of effective health promotion.

The IUHPE considers that this development work needs to be maintained and, in the case of systems and infrastructures, significantly expanded, to provide sound advice to enable Member States to invest with confidence in this field.

2. An increasingly important issue that needs to be actively addressed is eHealth. In order to help citizens, health systems, and companies working in this field, information regarding different kinds of eHealth innovations needs to be strongly developed and effectively shared. It would be useful to develop a surveillance system soon, in order to identify, document and share all eHealth innovations across the Community.

TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

1. Whereas legal instruments will in due course be required to underpin accredited health promotion practice, at this point the open method of coordination would be a more appropriate approach to raising professional standards of health promotion practice, and to improving health promotion systems and infrastructures.
2. The need to ensure that the basic right of patient confidentiality and information security is protected right across the Community now requires legal instruments that embody common standards, which are harmonised to the highest levels currently obtaining in Member States, and which provide for monitoring and enforcement.
3. The responsibility to protect citizens from harm from problematic health care providers right across the Community requires legal instruments that embody common standards, which are harmonised to the highest levels currently obtaining in Member States, and which provide for monitoring and enforcement.

NEXT STEPS

The IUHPE is looking forward to the Commission's response to the inputs from this consultation, and offers to be of service in future stages of this important endeavour.

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