



SAFE response to the European Commission Discussion document
on a Future Health Strategy for Europe

Oslo, 6 February 2007

The Stroke Alliance for Europe (SAFE) is a pan-European grouping of national stroke associations formed in 2004 following a strategic workshop held in the European Parliament in June 2003. SAFE main aims are to promote awareness and understanding of the risks of stroke and improve access to appropriate treatment for stroke sufferers.

Stroke is the third leading cause of death in Europe behind heart disease and cancer and the most common cause of adult disability, which accounts for around 3-4% of healthcare costs in most EU Member States. However, many strokes are preventable. Hypertension (high blood pressure) is the most common risk factor for stroke, so by getting regular blood pressure checks and treating hypertension where it is diagnosed (lifestyle changes such as losing weight or giving up smoking, taking prescribed medication if necessary), many strokes can be prevented.

SAFE welcomes the Commission's intentions for the future EU health strategy, in particular:

- the focus on core issues such as health determinants and health inequalities;
- the approach of setting a small number of broad objectives whose implementation and outcome will be measured;
- The suggestion to use the open method of coordination.

Specifically, SAFE would like to suggest that the future EU health strategy includes:

1. Specific measurable targets for stroke reduction across Europe;
2. Provision as part of the work on health determinants to undertake awareness raising activities on the risks stroke in countries where governments/patient groups lack the necessary resources or expertise;
3. Provision in the work on health inequalities to gather comparative data on stroke treatment and care across the EU;
4. Use of the open method of coordination to exchange experiences and develop European best practices in stroke care to reduce health inequalities in access to care.

Because of the link between stroke and hypertension, health promotion activities that encourage people to have their blood pressure checked have the potential to have a significant effect on the incidence of stroke. Currently, significant differences exist in the treatment and care of stroke across the EU, but there is evidence that the care provided by specialised stroke units is not only life-saving but reduces long term stroke related disability.



SAFE would also like to emphasise the importance of patient organisations and their work, and we would like the EU to help enable the growth of patient organisations that work on stroke prevention and the support of stroke survivors in each country.

SAFE thanks the European Commission for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on a future European health strategy. SAFE would also like to inform the Commission that we would be happy to discuss the points raised in our response to or provide more detail if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arne Hagen'.

Arne Hagen
President of SAFE

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