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**Consultation on the  
Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health  
Comments of the Austrian Medical Chamber**

**Introduction**

The Austrian Medical Chamber is the statutory professional organization of all doctors practising in Austria. We represent approximately 38 500 doctors - working either in a self-employed, or in an employed capacity. On the one hand, the Austrian Medical Chamber represents their professional, social and economic interests, on the other, it constitutes the competent national authority for Austrian doctors. The responsibilities of the Chamber comprise, besides others, the following areas: involvement in medical training, continuing medical training and professional development, quality assurance in continuing medical education and medical practice, the conclusion of contracts with social insurance institutions and of collective agreements, admission to and administration of the Medical Register, recognition of foreign medical diplomas, execution of disciplinary legislation and arbitration.

We welcome the Commission's initiative to specifically address the challenges regarding health professionals in Europe and would like to submit our comments as follows:

#### **Ad 4.1. Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce**

The Austrian Medical Chamber highly welcomes initiatives directed at ensuring better working conditions for health professionals, as well as initiatives directed at increasing staff motivation and morale of the work force. In our view the securing of attractive working conditions is of high importance. Attractive working conditions include more time for physicians to treat their patients and therefore more time for the practice of medicine, effective protection of the work force, compliance with working time regulations, adequate remuneration of hospital doctors as well as the creation of flexible working time models for hospital doctors including the possibility for senior doctors to reduce the number of night duties. Furthermore, a more effective deployment of the physician workforce could be reached by implementing measures to reduce bureaucracy, e.g. by implementing so-called documentation assistants in hospitals.

Motivating working conditions are the key points when it comes to the attractiveness of working in the health care sector. Physicians work under very strenuous conditions (e.g. night duties, high level of responsibility etc.) and are among those professions who are most frequently faced with burn-out. Therefore the European Commission should put more focus on the improvement of working conditions in the health care sector in order to sustainably ensure the attractiveness of working.

#### **Ad 4. 3. Training**

The Austrian Medical Chamber welcomes that focus should be put on continuous professional development of health professionals. However, it must be ensured that for one there is sufficient time for CME/CPD of physicians and for the other that sufficient funds are provided for the financing of CME/CPD by the health care system, especially when it comes to those CME/CPD requirements which are implemented by legislative acts.

#### **Ad 4. 4. Managing mobility of health workers within the EU**

Free movement of health professionals is one of the fundamental European principles. As pointed out by the European Commission, there are a variety of reasons for health professionals to move, like improved career and training opportunities or better pay and working conditions. Working experience in foreign countries broadens the horizons of physicians and other health professionals and provides them with valuable new perspectives and insight into other health systems. The promotion of “circular” movement of doctors and other health professionals, who move to another country for training and/or gaining experience for a limited time and then return to their home country with additional knowledge and skills, can be a win-win situation for both the country of origin as well as for the destination country. In addition, bilateral agreements between member states that face intensive migration of doctors can provide an effective tool to support migration in a way that puts no party at a disadvantage.

Mobility, however, can also cause severe disparities between countries. Member states that offer limited possibilities for the training and continuing professional development of doctors and other health professionals, and where the working conditions are unattractive, experience a “brain drain” of highly qualified health professionals, that leaves them short-staffed. This phenomenon puts the health systems of the affected countries in severe danger, since there is no adequate workforce available to provide sufficient care for the population.

Therefore it is of high importance that in all countries investments are made in high quality training and CPD of doctors and other health professionals on the one hand, and in better working conditions, including proper remuneration, on the other. Every member state should have the capacity to train a sufficient number of physicians and other health professionals as required by their population and health service demands, and to ensure continuity with regards to the necessary number of health personnel.

As mentioned under paragraph 7 on cohesion policy, Structural Funds can be used to develop the health workforce, and some of the younger Member States are planning major investments in the education and training of health professionals by using the ESF. All Member States, but especially those experiencing negative effects on their health care system through migration, should therefore be strongly encouraged to make use of the ESF to train and re-skill health professionals, to develop the health

workforce as such and most importantly to improve working conditions in the health care sector.

#### **Ad 5. The impact of new technology: improving the efficiency of the health workforce**

Ensuring better distribution of new technology throughout the European Union as well as taking action to encourage the use of new information technology must be subject to two main principles:

Firstly, ICT should only be implemented under the condition that it supports and benefits medical work and is adjusted to the needs of patients and health professionals. Secondly, patients on the one hand and physicians and other health professionals on the other must be the main beneficiaries of any type of e-health applications. This means that the implementation of new technology in health care must not be driven by market forces and the economic interest of the ICT industry.

Before new technology is implemented, acceptance of the health workforce to use this new technology must be ensured. To achieve acceptance among health professionals and especially doctors, they must be involved in the development of e-health technology, to make sure that the ICT tools are easy and safe to use in daily practice. Suitable training of doctors and other health professionals in order to make the best use of new technology is also vital in the process of implementation of these technologies.

#### **Ad 6. The Role of Health Professional Entrepreneurs in the workforce**

When encouraging more entrepreneurs to enter the health care sector, it must be clear that health services, due to their specific nature, have a particular position within professional services.

In all European countries, health services are subject to specific provisions, as they cover a highly sensitive area and are provided by experts subject to strict regulation of training and authorisation. They cannot be made subject to the principles of the free market, as they have to be available to every patient, regardless of his/her economic situation.

Market forces and promotional activities, which play a major role in other areas, are and should remain of minor importance in the field of health care, as the provision of medical services cannot be compared to ordinary consumer goods.

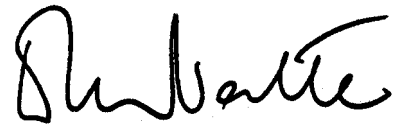
In the health care system more than in any other business, it must be guaranteed that the exercise of the medical profession remains free from any non-professional, purely economic influences. Each and every doctor is personally responsible to his patients that his acts are based exclusively on medical criteria, and are not determined by economic third party interests.

Yours sincerely,



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