

London, 30 March 2009

Green Paper “On the European Workforce for Health”

The Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries (COTEC) welcomes the initiative of this green paper to address the future trends and challenges that faces the health workforce.

We have to make one general comment; we feel that this green is addressed only to doctors and nurses and excludes allied health professionals, health administrators, and ancillary staff. **It is beyond doubt that the allied health professions have a very large impact on the health of the European citizens.**

The World Health Organization report (2006) on health resources acknowledges that people who help the health system to function but do not provide health services directly to the population are often forgotten in discussions about the health workforce. These individuals perform a variety of jobs, such as distributing medicines, maintaining essential buildings and equipment, and planning and setting directions for the system as whole.

The Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries represents more than 130.000 Occupational Therapists across Europe. Every year, the Council collects data and information regarding the development and the status of the profession in each country in order to develop, harmonize and improve standards of professional practice and education and to facilitate the free mobility of occupational therapists.

The responses to this green paper are based on the collected data and address the challenges that occupational therapists are facing as members of the multidisciplinary health team.

4.1 Demographic changes

In recent years the EU has emphasized the need for the prevention of the diseases and for health promotion.

This approach should also be accompanied by the design of alternative, more humanistic approaches and less dependent on the medical model. Health promotion centres where citizens could acquire the necessary information and consultation regarding their condition could alleviate the huge burden of the existing health services.

During the last decade, **European Occupational therapists have introduced and applied the empirically successful Lifestyle Redesign approach which includes the process of acquiring health promotion habits and routines. Lifestyle Redesign can enhance the health and quality of life for older adults and reduce health care costs.** To gain a more enduring European workforce, a similar lifestyle redesign approach has also been suggested for persons in younger, productive, years.

A thorough investigation of the needs of the different health professions in each country should be planned and carried out before designing the campaigns which will raise awareness for the benefits of working in the health and social sector. **The mobility of health professionals should be facilitated and supported by pressure on the national governments to follow the European regulations and directives.**

4.2 Public Health Capacity

Safety in the workplace is an issue with which the health workforce should be very well familiarized. Health professionals are exposed to hazardous situations and
Secretariat: British Association of Occupational Therapists ● 106-114 Borough High Street, London SE1 1LB, UK

they carry the danger beyond their workplace into their other environments. **A module informing and educating students in the health sector about the dangers and safety in their workplace should be mandatory for every profession.**

4.3 Training

Within the EU the highest possible qualification for all members of the workforce is desired, pressure should be put on national ministries of health and /or education to ensure that they are training health professionals at the expected level – e.g. **a minimum of bachelor's degree for therapists.**

Occupational Therapists developed and validated the European Competences following the Tuning process. Globally we are moving from a degree based market to the competence based market and health professionals should be ready to face this challenge. The competence based market should facilitate the mobility of health workers around different countries and different settings.

The introduction of the continual professional development should be encouraged and supported by national regulations in order to develop and sustain high quality of services and ensure patient safety.

The EU should support the development of national programs for continual professional development. **Governmental indifference or ignorance to the need for the continual evaluation of the health professional's competences along with the continual evaluation of the health services could bring fatal outcomes and raised the health costs.**

4.4 Managing mobility

An exchange of information about disciplinary action against health professionals where conduct has been questioned is welcomed; this needs to be standardized .e.g. registration as well as regulation in all countries for all health professionals.

Secretariat: British Association of Occupational Therapists ● 106-114 Borough High Street, London SE1 1LB, UK

Despite the Directive 2005/36/EC difficulties remain in obtaining recognition of qualifications. **In many countries national regulatory bodies set their own requirements and inhibit the free mobility of professionals. Clearer rules along with pressure on the national governments could facilitate the mobility of health professionals.**

4.5 Global Migration

The ethical problems raised here are welcomed and need to be given great consideration and linked to the responsibility of the EU countries towards increasing the education of health professionals in developing countries and so a link is needed here to “development aid” agencies and ministries.

4.6 Data Collection

Streamlining registration as well as regulation in all EU countries would enable a more satisfactory collection of data and at the same time provide the means of comparison across the EU and enable the identification of possible gaps in health care provision.

The regulatory bodies in each country could provide value data regarding the flows of health workers around Europe.

6. Health professionals as entrepreneurs

Systems, standards and conditions of practice vary a great deal between EU countries and in some places, especially close to borders it may be that some professionals are disadvantaged by differing conditions which allow the same service at very different rates of reimbursement – this is not only an economic problem where earnings vary from one country to the next it is also due to conditions of setting up a business.



National regulations should put the framework for developing entrepreneurial activity in the health sector. These regulations should respect the human rights of the patients and ensure the patient safety.

Sincerely yours,

Maria Skouroliakos
President of COTEC

This paper represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumers DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.