



EPSA Response

GREEN PAPER On the European Workforce for Health



EUROPEAN PHARMACEUTICAL STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

EPSA, Rue du Luxembourg 19-21, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

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1. Introduction

The European Pharmaceutical Students' Association (EPSA) is an independent, peaceful, democratic, non-political, non-profit European organization committed to the interests of pharmacy students, and the ultimate benefit of society. EPSA represents over 120,000 pharmacy students in 29 European Countries. It exists to develop the interests and opinions of European pharmacy students and to encourage contact and cooperation between them. One of the main tools for achieving this goal is EPSA Working Committees, as well as EPSA events, EPSA website and forum.

EPSA works under the motto: Bringing Pharmacy, Knowledge and Students together.

EPSA welcomes the public debate on the promotion of a sustainable workforce for health in Europe and the opportunity to respond to this consultation, as the students in pharmacy are part of the future healthcare professionals and are directly interested in the well going of this branch.

The challenges in the European Public Health were the theme of a workshop hold during the last EPSA Autumn Assembly, so that students were aware of the general framework of this consultation.

The Green Paper launched by the European Commission was approached by the members in two of EPSA's working committees (Mobility and Public Health) and the outcomes of students' discussions are presented below.

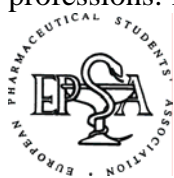
2. Answer to the consultation

Demography and the development of a sustainable workforce

The ageing of the population is one of the keys aspects that define Public Health decisions. Referring to the management of chronic diseases that accompany this evolution of the demography, we think that a complex strategy should be implemented, involving not only the development of specific types of drugs or improvement of social facilities, but also the improvement of the observation and long-term care of the patient. Besides the adequate treatment and a solid and specialized medical team, it is fundamental to develop the palliative care of these patients since their conditions evolve quite easily to morbidity and terminal conditions which need to be as human and as dignifying as possible. The need of a qualified workforce specialized in gerontology and age-related pathology and psychology is extreme and we believe that this will have a significant impact in the future health scene. It is needed a "basis" of care that involves occupational psychotherapists, social assistants and other social specialists in order to provide a broader view of the situation of the patient. This also includes all the family support and care the patient needs and deserves.

On the other hand, we have the workforce itself, which also ages. It is important to provide the Health professionals with the Health support they need, not only to carry on their functions and jobs, but also to get these professionals to work better and longer. The need of taxes for paying the pensions makes the European governments to increase the retirement age in order to make older working people pay as a young worker to fill the gap that this demographic flip-flop created. But we wonder whether a 65-70 years old doctor, nurse or pharmacist could have the same work capacity as their younger colleagues and if these measures wouldn't do more harm than well, by putting at risk the patients Health in order to save capital to fill the gap that society itself automatically created.

For preventing this risky situation, a solution would be raising young people's interest in the healthcare professions. However, this may also be an issue, as in many countries these are considered not very well



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remunerated jobs if we take into account the long period of training and the responsibility that they involve. Therefore, we propose the organization of promotion campaigns of healthcare professions in high schools and the offer of special places in faculties for people belonging to ethnic minorities and disadvantaged social groups. Also, we think that a solution for increasing the workforce would be the professional reconversion for people who are unemployed (as social caregivers or nurses), according to their age and previous level of academic preparation or establishing more sanatoria for aged people, with full time healthcare employees (who would be rewarded not only with their salary but also with the lodging). We also support the increase of the role of pharmacists in managing chronic diseases, by giving them the authority of refilling prescriptions and adjusting the treatment of supervised patients.

Finally, approaching the issue from the public health perspective, whose main aim is the prevention of disease, we encourage the increase in volume of healthy living campaigns dedicated to the general public, but especially to the young and mid-age people, who still have the chance for healthy aging.

Public Health Capacity

We are aware of the diversity and complexity of the PH workforce and of the fact that they are trained in a variety of institutional settings (public/private sector), from where arises the need for coordination among all providers of PH services. The education of healthcare professionals is also a dynamic process, as they have to be aware of the developments in clinical information, procedures, practices and research and also to respond to the needs of better informed and more sophisticated patients. Given these facts, we believe that a good strategy in building a strong health workforce would be a shift from transmitting large amounts of technical knowledge to teaching how to manage change, and this conversion should be realized starting from the first courses in the faculty.

Unfortunately, the appropriate training of the Health Workforce of Europe doesn't solve all the problems; the funds to finance hospitals, screening programs and other preventing actions are becoming more and scarcer and the results are not meeting the costs. The need of an urgent re-evaluation of the workforce, the financial support, state funding and means of work starts to appear as essential to obliterate some of the problems health systems face today. It has been proved that the prevention of the disease and the awareness it creates does not only prevent the people to become sick, with all the physiological and psychological consequences, but also, in terms of costs to the Health system, it can generate savings in orders of thousands or even millions of euro each year.

Regarding the relation between Public Health and Labor Health, this is in our vision one of the most important synergies that will perform in the next century, since some of the most killing diseases derive from many of the daily work consequences (stress, the deficient or inadequate nutrition, the decrease of sleeping hours). The entrepreneurs and CEO's of various companies should be aware of the fact that some of the major risk factors that affect people's condition derive from the daily work and they could even adopt solutions for their employees, such as sport classes inside the company to decrease the accumulated stress or the implementation of rest rooms. There is also, in a more serious way, the prevention of labor accidents, which has an important role in high-risk jobs like the construction or chemical branches. The synchrony between Health professionals, the entrepreneurs and the workforce is essential and need to be constantly observed in order to reduce casualties that, here in Portugal, have high numbers

As conclusion, we must say that the capacity that Public Health needs to reach to achieve the goal of keeping up with the development of workforces, work rhythms and the evolution of work methods itself. The Health workforce needs to adapt, to be funded properly and be as active as the population needs appear urgent. The general workforce must count on the good sense of the entrepreneurs, that should protect the laborers from the silent threats that the day-by-day work slowly invade their Health, causing



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problems in long-terms that are, not only expensive for the system itself, but that also are extremely dangerous to the person

The role of health professional entrepreneurs in the workforce

We are aware of the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises in the healthcare domain, as they bring benefits not only to the involved workforce, who would be more stimulated to work for their own business, but also for the general health system, stimulating the competitive spirit and also increasing the quality of services. On the other side, we know that this kind of activities may generate more expensive services than those offered by the state or the big, experienced health institutions. To overcome this shortcoming, we suggest promoting the voluntary work in this kind of enterprises, under the form of internships or minimum-paid practices, involving students from the medical area. This would be a chance for the involved students to gain professional experience and would also induce them the entrepreneurial spirit.

We see another important aspect about the SME. Their activity would have a great impact in small towns and villages where the big healthcare institutions are not represented and where the population, mainly elderly, is in great need of professional care. Of course, starting a business in the rural area is not very challenging for young entrepreneurs, but we think it has a great potential and it would be an attractive idea if the state would offer some benefits to the investors, such as lowering the taxes they have to pay or facilitating the acquisition of the necessary medical equipment. Moreover, the workforce could be employed under a part-time contract. After assessing the health problems of the patients from the respective area, the health professionals could keep in touch with them by phone calls or emails, assuring a kind of distance healthcare.

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The impact of new technology: improving the efficiency of the health workforce

The new technology development has significant influence on the efficiency of the health workforce, but we are aware of the fact that besides the great disadvantages that it brings it is accompanied by some issues, such as the big costs. They refer not only to the price of acquisition of the medical devices, but also to their maintenance and the costs afferent to the health professionals' training. And these problems are mainly encountered in developing countries, where the population is maybe in greater need of new solutions for their conditions, as people's health status seem to be lower than in developed countries. Of course, this is a vicious cycle that maybe could be interrupted if the EU would allocate more funds for supporting the health systems from the developing countries in their modernization process. And the action should be not only in the direction of equipping the medical institutions with the need medical devices, but also in providing the appropriate continuous training of the health workforce operating on the respective systems. For this, we suggest the constitution of expert groups at EU level that would visit the developing countries and train the local health professionals and also ensure the permanent contact with them for solving the occurring problems.

In what concerns the encouragement of the use of new technology, we think that the reticence is mainly met among older health professionals, who were used with the classical methods and perceive the modern techniques as a potential threat. In our opinion, this attitude resides in the lack of knowledge on using the new technology, therefore training the respective health professionals would also be the solution, as helping them develop new skills would facilitate the understanding and the acceptance of the new devices and methods.



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