



FEDERATION OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou
European Commission
DG Health and Consumer Protection
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

Denmark April 8, 2009

Concerning: EU Consultation on Green Paper for EU Workforce for Health

Dear Madam,

The Federation of Occupational Health Nurses within the European Union (FOHNEU) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation process on the Green Paper for EU Workforce for Health and grateful that the deadline has been extended to 10 April 2009.

FOHNEU is a non profit making organisation representing occupational health nurses within EU Member States. Occupational health nurses are employed in many types of enterprises including multi-nationals and Health Services throughout the EU. The latter employers rely very heavily on the delivery of an occupational health service to their health care employees by competent occupational health nurses who are personally and professionally responsible for their own practice and are included in the Occupational Health team as independent professionals.

Many occupational health nurses manage occupational health services employing appropriate professionals as needed thus utilizing all skilled members of the team economically. In many of the western European countries nurse entrepreneurs have established their own services as providers of occupational health to healthcare employees.

Health at work and a healthy work environment are amongst the most valuable assets of individuals, communities and countries. Occupational Health is an important strategy not only to ensure the health of workers, but also to contribute positively to production, the quality of health services work motivation and job satisfaction and to the overall quality of life of individuals and society.

Specialist occupational health nursing expertise and advanced nursing practice, including the post-registration education and training are invisible in EU healthcare documents. We therefore welcome the opportunity to address our concerns outlined in the response below.

FOHNEU: Response to the article The Green Paper on Workforce

Our position is as follows:

General comments: It is well known that workers mobility as well as flexible working schemes are risk factors for their mental health. Shortage of health professionals should be solved by promoting working conditions so that recruitment and retaining would be feasible. In a high intensity workplaces, as hospitals are, increasing retirement age or getting health professionals back to work will worsen both their health and safety and the quality of care they provide.

Specific comments:

1. Public health capacity (page 7)

The Green Paper should focus more on the occupational health for the health professionals. The well-known occupational diseases due to exposure to physical, chemical and biological hazards are still an issue and there are new ones arising all the time, in addition to occupational accidents, ergonomic and psychosocial hazards. These are problems for employees in general but also for nurses and if taken into account in the promotion of a safer working environment it could be a positive measure for keeping staff in service and recruiting easier new one.

A healthy workforce is vital for sustainable social and economic development on local, national and global level. The workplace environment should be maintained and promoted as a healthy and safe sphere of activity.

2. Promotion of occupational health

Although the nurse is included as an OH provider in page 8 it should be mentioned throughout the document, because the occupational health nurse has direct access to workers, often on a daily basis, and therefore becomes the first point of contact for many health-related questions and problems. The specialist OHN is a fully trained registered Nurse who in addition to their general nursing education and training will have undertaken an additional period of formal study in OH, leading to a specialist qualification, most often at University degree level.

Occupational health nurses are the single largest group of health care professionals involved in workplace health management in all EU countries. The Green Paper should recognise the important key role of the specialist OHN and the EU legislation should support their work and development.

Yours sincerely

Julie Staun
President

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This letter has also been sent by regular mail.

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