

“IAGG-European Region” response to the European Commission Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health

The Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health recognizes that “policy makers and health authorities have to face the challenge of adapting their healthcare systems to an ageing population”. The problem of malnutrition¹ will provide a major part of this challenge as it affects an estimated one third of senior citizens - over 50 million across Europe - a figure set to rise with Europe’s rapidly increasing ageing population. Unless properly addressed, this issue will have massive consequences not only for health but also for Member States’ health systems, given the huge costs involved².

There is already recognition at EU-level that urgent action needs to be taken. The European Parliament in two separate Resolutions last year³ urged the Commission “to take a more holistic approach to nutrition and make malnutrition, alongside obesity, a key priority in the fields of nutrition and health, incorporating it wherever possible into EU-funded research, education and health promotion initiatives and EU-level partnerships”. As regards the EU’s health strategy, MEPs called on Member States, along with regional and local authorities, to “improve the exchange of best practice” and called on the Commission “to be proactive in producing guidelines and recommendations based on such good practice.” Furthermore, the Commission has now recognized malnutrition as a priority under its 2009 Health Programme. However, much more could be done at EU-level to ensure that malnutrition is properly addressed across Europe.

“IAGG-European Region” agrees that specialist skills are needed in light of an increasingly ageing population and supports actions suggested in the Green Paper, such as specialised training courses and updating professional skills. In particular, IAGG-ER would like to see specialised training to teach health professionals what malnutrition is, how to screen for it and ultimately how to care for people suffering from it. We would therefore like to see the following actions given urgent attention:

- Inclusion of **nutrition in the curricula** of all health professionals
- Making **dieticians** available and easy in access in all EU countries.
- **Mandatory nutritional screening** in all EU Member States in community healthcare as a preventative measure and upon entry into any healthcare situation
- Dissemination of **ESPEN guidelines on nutritional care** for all categories of health professionals, which should be complemented by **training** (for example, via health professionals’ continuous professional development)

IAGG-ER believes that the EU has a crucial role to play in promoting cooperation between Member States and coordinating their policies and best practices. It might therefore also be useful to have an ‘observatory’ to assist Member States in planning future workforce training needs and implementation.

¹ Malnutrition is defined as an imbalance of energy, protein, and other nutrients that causes measurable adverse effects on tissue and body form and function as well as clinical outcomes

² A landmark study conducted in the UK by BAPEN in 2005 estimated that the cost of managing patients with malnutrition was a staggering 12 billion euros per year

³ [Resolution](#) on the European Commission’s White Paper on A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues (COM (2007) 0279) and [Resolution](#) on White Paper on Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013 (COM (2007) 630)

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In light of the need to train health professionals to be able to properly address malnutrition, IAGG-ER also supports the suggestion set out in the Green Paper to make more use of the support offered by structural funds to train and re-skill health professionals and to improve the use of the structural funds for the development of the health workforce.

The International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics – European Region is the European branch of the Worldwide organization, founded in Belgium in 1950 to promote research and disseminating the results of it in the fields of gerontology and geriatrics.

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