



Response to
Consultation Paper
Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health

Novartis is a leading pharmaceutical company providing medicines in a wide range of disease areas and active at a global level. The company's objectives include curing diseases and enhancing the quality of life. Such goals cannot be met without the existence of a professional and well-trained healthcare workforce.

For this reason, Novartis strongly supports the Commission initiative to instigate a debate on the current and future challenges faced by the European healthcare workforce. A reflection on the changing European environment (ageing population, increased mobility, etc.) is crucial to raising the standards of healthcare in Europe. A well-trained, well-resourced and efficient health workforce is a key element of effective health systems, but has also the potential to attract more medical research and investments in Europe.

Training

Novartis shares the importance given by the Green Paper to training. It is of crucial importance that health professionals obtain adequate training and support both prior to starting their activity and during their whole career.

a) Support provided by the industry to deliver highest-quality training and education

Novartis sees the pharmaceutical industry as a valuable actor in providing resources and knowledge for an up-to-date and life-long training of the healthcare workforce. While the primary responsibility for ensuring the proficiency of workers falls upon the relevant academic institutions, public or private, the industry can offer a high degree of knowledge across many aspects of health. This includes a first-hand understanding of drugs/treatments and the conditions for their administration, but also of the evolving needs of patients. As medicine is slowly shifting towards more 'personalised' healthcare solutions, the industry has to constantly pre-empt new patients' requirements, find new ways to provide for unmet medical needs, and to develop its products accordingly. The necessity to adapt faced by the pharmaceutical sector is also confronting healthcare professionals.

With such an ever-evolving healthcare environment in mind, and considering the expertise developed by the industry, Novartis believes that Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are an efficient way to ensure that valuable knowledge is shared among all healthcare stakeholders.

The industry can be of major support with respect to training in some specific areas:

- Rare diseases: for some diseases, very little information is available. It is not uncommon that existing treatments have been developed by just a single pharmaceutical company and that general knowledge is limited. The industry therefore finds itself in a privileged position to provide first-hand information.
- Fighting counterfeited medicines: healthcare professionals have a role to play in detecting counterfeits, hence requiring an appropriate training. Pharmaceutical companies, who have the responsibility to develop and apply security features, should play a key role in the aforementioned trainings.

b) Life-long learning to ensure periodic review of existing vaccine preventable diseases

An important element to build a public health capacity includes the adequate training of healthcare workers in the area of vaccines and vaccine preventable infectious diseases.

In particular and in view of the variety of medicines developed and registered in the past years, it is also important for healthcare workforce to have an up to date knowledge on the new vaccines in order to ensure their optimal and efficient use in the target populations.

Additionally some existing vaccines essential to be ready in the event of a pandemic, such as influenza, are still highly unutilized. This can, at least partly, be explained, by lack of appropriate understanding by healthcare professionals about the burden of influenza disease, vaccine benefits and risks associated with their usage.

Therefore, ensuring long life training in the areas of vaccines for healthcare workers is essential to build public health capacity at EU level.

c) Ensure adequate levels of preparedness with respect to the Paper's objective of building a Public Health Capacity – preparedness in view of global pandemics:

Novartis supports the Green Papers objective to build a high-quality Public Health Capacity, and in particular in view of responding to outbreaks of infectious diseases and global pandemics. Given the key role that vaccination policies play in preventing and responding to outbreaks of infectious diseases , it is crucial that the European health workforce has a uniform level of preparedness in this area including:

- relevant training to face unusual health threats from infectious communicable diseases (cf. to the H5N1 case)
- relevant training to face infectious disease outbreaks (e.g. Meningitis)
- relevant training and plan to face health threats of very large proportions, i.e. requiring the intervention of a large number of health professionals in a short period of time
- Relevant training to raise awareness on the use of pre-pandemic and pandemic vaccines in order to prepare the healthcare workforce to respond to major pandemic outbreaks

Reorganisation of healthcare systems

Novartis considers that adapting the healthcare workforce to meet the needs of today's patients can only make sense if the organisation and structure of the healthcare system is equally adapted. New models should tend toward a holistic, patient-centred approach to disease management, and put greater emphasis on health outcomes.

a) Patient-centred approach to disease management

Current hospital/practice structures, organised around specialities or services (primary care physician, specialist, neurologist, psychologist, imaging unit, etc.) often fail to provide optimal healthcare solutions. Patients with a particular condition, requiring the intervention of several different healthcare practitioners and services, would benefit from more integrated and multi-disciplinary healthcare structures.

Practices centred around a medical condition, providing comprehensive assistance to patients, tend to offer high quality care and outcomes.

As an example, cancer patients need highly trained oncologists, imaging specialists, and nutrition specialists for tailored nutrition, psychological support, etc. Uncoordinated and inefficient work between specialists and services can hamper the quality of the care provided.

b) Working methods and outcomes of professionals

Comparison studies between healthcare systems, between hospitals or between professionals can reveal **differences in terms of health outcomes**. Depending on the organisation of healthcare systems, of hospital structures (patient-centric or not), or on the approach of individual practitioners, the quality of the health dispensed, and hence the extent of recovery, can significantly vary. It is therefore critical to focus public attention on medical outcomes and find ways to record and compare these outcomes. This will allow both health professionals and policy makers to find what works best and learn from each other. There should be no recrimination. But there should be transparency and continuous monitoring of performance and outcomes. It is a well accepted principle that measurements are a fundamental tool for efficient management. Health professionals are not different to any other worker. By getting them to focus on outcomes, we can motivate them to become more efficient, better informed and more patient focused.

Moreover, new, better adapted methods should be promoted, such as multidisciplinary teams, greater involvement of nurses and pharmacists in the delivery of services, etc. This aspect should be considered with respect to the specific objectives spelled out under FP7 for the efficiency of healthcare systems.

c) Centres of excellence.

A third aspect of the reorganisation of healthcare systems concerns the promotion of centres of excellence. Novartis sees such centres as a model encouraging the concentration of knowledge and high-level proficiency in curing patients. Healthcare professionals are a key element to their development and should be given the tools to increase the level of excellence of their practices by greater exchange of best practice and adequate training.

Centres of excellence are particularly helpful in the case of rare diseases. Where only a very small share of the national population is affected by a rare condition, the development of specialised centres at a national level can be difficult, if not impossible, to set up; especially in smaller Member States. EU-wide centres of excellence are in many cases the only solution to tackle rare or neglected diseases and offer to patients adequate and up-to-standard healthcare solutions.

Mobility

Novartis shares the Commission's outlook with respect to the need to foster an optimised mobility of healthcare professionals across the EU. Initiatives designed to fine-tune the distribution of the health workforce and to maximise the exchange of knowledge/best practice are strongly supported. Consideration should be given to amending the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive to further remove barriers allowing private operators to freely establish themselves in all Member States, subject to appropriate, but not discriminatory, local regulations (including language requirements).

In particular, mobility is crucial in the field of rare diseases to ensure that the highest-quality healthcare solutions are available across Europe. Experts in disease areas touching only a minor number of patients should be given the possibility to easily join centres of excellence in

other countries. A concentration of knowledge and expertise is key to develop treatments for poorly-resourced treatment areas.

Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce

Future recruitment policies will need to be increasingly flexible and bare in mind the constrains of demographic and mobility trends. Novartis encourages the reorganisation of recruitment to take better account of pan-European trends (not just national realities). This implies setting up efficient ways of assessing the need for workforce in the various regions of Europe and to create a mechanism to avoid shortages or surpluses of workers.

Whilst recruitment and retention are clearly the responsibilities of Member States, action at European, and indeed international, level to develop a voluntary Code of Conduct on Ethical Recruitment policies with regard to recruiting health workers from developing countries would be helpful. Greater emphasis should be placed on exchanging professionals and expertise between Member States and between the EU and third countries, but with prospects for professionals to return to their country of origin; thereby taking new skills, experience and expertise with them.

Parallel to more efficient recruitment, the attractiveness of healthcare jobs and the quality of educational curricula must be improved to ensure that enough people embark on relevant health-related training.

Other aspects

Expenditure for workforce

Novartis supports initiatives to improve the collection of data relevant to the level of expenditure for the healthcare workforce. Benchmarking in this area would play in favour of a more optimal and fair compensation of workers across the EU.

Increased role for the patient: Self-medication and better information

The role played by the patient in curing his disease/alleviating his suffering is constantly increasing. Patients with a better understanding of their condition can more actively participate to provide solutions to their illnesses. In particular, self-medication for minor conditions and greater self-care in management of chronic conditions are fields where individuals can play a greater role. This can result in alleviating the burden experienced by a sometime overwhelmed or ill-resourced healthcare workforce (especially visits to General Practitioners). Initiatives to encourage informed and proactive patients, as well as to support the role of the pharmacist in self-care and self-medication, should therefore be promoted at the European level. Health practitioners (GPs, specialists) should play an important role in providing relevant advice/information, role which must be reflected in the academic curriculum in view of their qualification as doctors.

Vaccination of healthcare workers

Healthcare workers constitute a major factor of transmission to patients. In order to limit the contagion of the healthcare workforce and to ensure patients safety, WHO recommends vaccination of Health Care Workers against the following diseases¹:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B

¹ OMS, Prevention of hospital-acquired infections A PRACTICAL GUIDE, Chapter X, WHO/CDS/CSR/EPH/2002.12

- Measles, Mumps and Rubella
- Varicella
- Pertussis (vaccination diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis)
- Meningitis (vaccination Neisseria meningitides)
- Influenza

Vaccination of healthcare workers is therefore a key element in the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections and effective implementation measures should be developed at EU level.

Please feel free to contact us to discuss any of the points raised in this submission.

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