



## PCN POSITION PAPER ON THE CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Throughout Europe nurses are the largest occupational group in the health care sector, providing the majority of direct patient and client care. Consequently, the Standing Committee of Nurses of the EU (PCN) finds it important that nurses contribute to the debate of the Union's ideas on older people care and active ageing.

People over the age of 80 are the fastest growing segment of the older population in Europe. The average life expectancy in the EU is one of the highest in the world, and is continuing to rise. This will influence and orientate the role of health care professionals, particularly nurses, within public health and the provision of health care services.

Within a single European market older people care services need to be responsive to individual needs. Successful aging means autonomy and independence of the older person and successful physical, social and mental functioning. In many cases successful care will depend on nurses, who base their work on citizens' own resources and are closest to identify early symptoms of impairments. Nurses play a key preventive role, anticipating the need for early interventions and drawing on skills and knowledge of other health care professionals, like doctors.

### **Therefore, nurses play a pivotal role in:**

- the health care system and in the individual citizen's experiences of health provision;
- initiating change and improvement at local level, in the public health sector;
- helping health care organisations to develop services that are designed from an older person's point of view.

### **PCN calls on the Commission and the European Parliament:**

- To strengthen patients' and citizens' rights in European legislation;
- To provide a legal base for EU health policy in the EC Treaty to enable the Council and the Parliament to pursue more pro-active EU health care and public health policy;
- To inform EU citizens about their health care rights and the quality assurance of services provided by health care professionals;
- To guarantee the compatibility between European social policy and the free market principles;



- To follow up the Gothenburg European Council outcome calling on the Commission to prepare a progress report on guidelines in the field of health care for older people;
- To continue the reforms already introduced so that spending evolves at a viable pace, as part of policies that seek to improve the quality of public health and health care and ensure that adequate financing is provided for older people care and active ageing;
- To establish European Education standards for health care professionals and promote co-operation between health care institutions in order to provide appropriate healthcare services by competent professionals based on evidence based research;
- To develop EU legislation that ensures appropriate nurse / patient ratios in nursing homes and other health services for older people by addressing issues associated with the working environment. Quality services and patient morbidity have a direct corroboration with adequate qualified nurse staffing. It is imperative that staffing levels are based on scientific evidence of skill mix and workload measurements which take into account the different needs of older people.

*The Standing Committee of Nurses of the EU (PCN) was established in 1971. PCN represents over three quarters of a million nurses and is the independent voice of the nursing profession. Members consist of the national nurses associations, from the fifteen EU Member States and Associate Members are drawn from nursing associations in countries, which are members of the Council of Europe. The mission of PCN is to safeguard the status and practice of the profession of nursing and the interests of nurses in the EU and Europe.*