The European Medical Students’ Association
Comments on
“Health in Europe: A Strategic Approach”

January 31, 2007
Introduction

The European Medical Students’ Association, hereafter EMSA, welcomes and fully supports the European Commission’s initiatives in developing a common EU Health Strategy for 2007-2013.

Healthcare Systems of the European Union’s Member States face substantial challenges, in which sustainability needs to be established without simultaneously jeopardising high standards, accessibility, patient safety and solidarity. On the other hand, medical, technological and social developments in healthcare demand an exponentially rising contribution from the Member States.

Although according to the Treaties,\(^1,2\) managing of healthcare is the sovereign responsibility of the Member States, certain measures need to be developed to ensure common guidelines set for the EU Health Strategy and reforms in Healthcare Systems accordingly are implemented in all Member States.

Taking these into account, the European Medical Students’ Association issues the following suggestions regarding the development of the EU Health Strategy 2007-2013.

\(^1\) Maastricht Treaty, article 129  
\(^2\) Amsterdam Treaty, article 152
1. Increasing Inter-European Healthcare Interaction

Cross-border care ensures that patients are able to receive the highest quality of healthcare closest to their permanent residences. Increasing interaction over the borders of the Member States improves the sustainability, quality, safety, accessibility and cost-effectiveness of healthcare.

Several examples have shown that trans-regional and trans-national cooperation can contribute to combating problems that all European healthcare systems encounter.3,4,5,6

Nevertheless, most of these cooperative approaches to healthcare are executed in former EU-15 Member States; therefore, EMSA calls upon further facilitation of interaction of this kind between all Member States.

Moreover, this co-operation should not limit itself to medical treatment and care but also include activities such as exchange of healthcare professionals, healthcare students, education and research, share of equipment, management, funding and organisational structure.7

EMSA urges the European Commission to take further initiatives in increasing healthcare interaction not only in the field of geographically close cross-border care activities, but on a wider European level.

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7 Grewin: speech delivered at the Health Care Professionals on European Health Policy, EU Health Care Congress, Düsseldorf 22 November 2004
2. Decreasing Health Inequalities

EMSA calls upon and fully supports further action in striving to reduce the health inequalities in Europe.

A great deal of studies have focused on trying to identify the causes of these health inequalities and stressing out the importance of promoting health by concentrating both on the promotion of healthier lifestyles and on improvement of social and economic conditions, as well as active European citizenship.8,9,10

EMSA urges the European Commission to give a guiding role to healthcare systems in change, especially new Member States, by providing them the proper knowledge and assistance in implementing reforms in order to develop a sustainable, high quality healthcare and ensure broad Members State compliance with regulation, around agreed minimum standards through active regulatory enforcement.11


3. Increasing Inter-sectoral Interaction

Although EU law has limited specific competence in the area of health, its influence on other policy sectors such as agriculture, trade, and employment has wide ranging implications for health.

High-quality care depends on both effective health teams and efficient health organisations. Professionalism therefore implies multiple commitments - to the patient, to fellow professionals, and to the institution or system within which healthcare is provided, to the extent that the system supports patients collectively.12

Based on the above, EMSA calls upon enhancing interaction between all stakeholders in healthcare system - decision makers, health professionals, patient organisations, healthcare students, etc. - to be able to develop a better understanding of common European health policies and their implementation and to increase the overall efficiency and sustainability of healthcare systems.13,14

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4. Increasing Mobility

EMSA urges the European Commission to elaborate proper tools and instruments to support mobility among healthcare professionals, all stakeholders in healthcare, as well as healthcare students in accordance with the Bologna Process.

Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of cross-cultural interaction among different healthcare systems which can provide a framework for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of one’s own healthcare system.\textsuperscript{15,16}

In our view, increased mobility serves also as a tool for sharing ideas in the fields of quality assessment and quality improvement in both healthcare systems and medical curricula.

The European Commission has played a key role in organising professional and student mobility programmes and in emphasising the need for a European medical culture. The need for a common core of medical principles and efforts to strengthen inter-European cooperation nurture the philosophy of these exchanges.\textsuperscript{17}


5. Reviewing Healthcare Curricula

A curriculum in health systems and health policy is crucial for the education of all future physicians and other health professionals, therefore EMSA fully supports the European harmonisation and quality assessment and improvement of healthcare curricula in the spirit of the Bologna Process.\(^{18,19,20}\)

More emphasis should be given to domains of organisation of clinical and public health systems; health services financing; health workforce; interdisciplinary interaction, health advocacy and health policy process and on the European nature of these.\(^{21,22,23}\)

\(^{18}\) EMSA/IFMSA: Quality Assurance in Medical Schools - Moving from Quality Assurance to Quality Improvement, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 6-10, 2005

\(^{19}\) EMSA/IFMSA: European Core Curriculum - The Students’ Perspective, July 6-10, 2006, Bristol (UK)


6. Developing Health-conscious Society

EMSA welcomes the recent initiatives of the European Commission in constructing the common European public health strategy.\textsuperscript{24,25}

EMSA urges further EU-wide implementation of the above mentioned and calls upon support to stakeholders, especially NGOs involved in the process of facilitating the development on a health-conscious generation of European citizens in order to improve the health status and combat health inequalities.

\textsuperscript{24} Commissioners Byrne’s Reflection Process “Enabling Good Health for All”

\textsuperscript{25} Amended proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a second Programme of Community action in the field of Health (2007-2013)
Conclusion

The economic and cultural pressure on healthcare caused by an ageing population and higher expectations of the quality and accessibility of care can only increase. The healthcare sector in particular has to deal with the rising demand for services in addition to limited budgetary conditions.

EMSA strongly believes, that EU regulation can and do have a major impact on health service provision, despite the best attempts of national governments to retain control of healthcare.\textsuperscript{26}

Harmonisations of healthcare and public health strategies have mainly focused on researching healthcare determinants and combating communicable diseases. We therefore applaud initiatives to develop a common EU health strategy based on a broader platform.

EMSA suggests to fully implement the new EU Health Strategy 2007-2013, in which emphasis should be given to

\begin{itemize}
  \item combating social and trans-national health inequalities by promoting a healthier lifestyle
  \item assisting the development of a health-conscious society
  \item constant re-evaluation in health strategic planning by enhancing interaction between all stakeholders in healthcare
  \item increasing appearance of European and community responsibility values in education of healthcare professionals
  \item harmonisation of healthcare curricula throughout Europe
  \item increasing mobility and interaction between all stakeholders involved in healthcare
\end{itemize}

EMSA resolves to maintain an active role during this consultation process.

Correspondence:
European Medical Students’ Association
EMSA European Board
eeb@emsa-europe.org

\textsuperscript{26} EMSA response to the EC Consultation regarding Community action on health services, Pécs, Hungary, 5\textsuperscript{th} October 2006
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