

***PRESS RELEASE***

**HEALTH FIRST EUROPE AND MEPs HIGHLIGHT NEED FOR  
IMMEDIATE EU ACTION ON HEALTHCARE-ASSOCIATED  
INFECTIONS:**

**Brussels, 23 OCTOBER, 2007**

On 17 October, MEPs and Health First Europe hosted an event in the European Parliament which highlighted the need for immediate and decisive EU action to help reduce the 50,000 fatalities\* caused by healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs) in Europe each year. Healthcare workers, patients, senior EU decision-makers and medical experts from all over Europe convened to debate the urgency and gravity of the situation and to call on the European Commission and Member States to rapidly agree and adopt appropriate measures that will help to significantly reduce HCAIs across Europe.

Participants were reminded of the remarks of Markos Kyprianou, European Commissioner for Health, on the First European Communicable Disease Epidemiological Report 2007, in which he states that there are approximately three million HCAIs in the European Union each year, and that one in ten patients who receives hospital treatment acquires a HCAI.

Held in the European Parliament and supported and co-hosted by Liz Lynne MEP (UK, ALDE) and Avril Doyle MEP (Ireland, EPP-ED), the event highlighted the increasingly prevalent incidences of HCAIs and the enormous drain on national health budgets. Mary Banotti, Honorary President of Health First Europe, stressed that “patients who contract HCAIs such as MRSA are much more likely to die as those who don’t and will spend on average about three times longer in hospital. This is just not acceptable.”

Avril Doyle, MEP added: “National governments quite rightly invest time and resources in preparing contingency plans for a potential avian flu pandemic, but they are not doing nearly enough to address the existing pandemic of HCAIs, which is killing 50,000 people per year.”

Liz Lynne MEP, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Social Affairs Committee, will continue to urge her Committee when it convenes in late October to prioritise HCAIs in relation to health and safety at work and emphasise that they present unacceptable occupational risks to care homes and hospitals.

She said: “There is an enormous disparity in the level of HCAIs across the EU. The same level of protection should be available wherever you are in the EU. We need to learn quickly from best practices in the EU and encourage universal implementation. The commission has an important role to play. We need to move urgently towards a European code of practice for the prevention and management of these infections.”

Professor Gian Maria Rossolini of the Università di Siena in Italy added: “Studies have provided ample evidence that the HCAI crisis needs to be dealt with now. Politicians need to work with medical experts and institutions such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to build synergies and share their best practice.”

The European Commission stated that it is making strenuous efforts to listen to the experiences of experts and patients so that more can be done to tackle HCAIs. In addition, the ECDC informed delegates that it is hosting the Anti-Microbial Resistance Day in 2008 to help raise awareness of HCAIs and the need for clear and timely action. In addition, Health First Europe hopes that the European Commission’s White Paper on Health, due to be published on 23 October, will also be sufficiently far-reaching to call for a White Paper specifically on HCAIs.



- ENDS -

**Notes to Editors:**

The event attracted high-level participants including:

- **The European Centre for Disease Control;**
- **The WHO Regional Office for Europe;**
- **Several high-profile MEPs currently taking action on health issues.**

To set up an interview with one of the following experts, patients and/or healthcare workers from your country, please contact the Health First Europe Secretariat on 0032 (0) 2626 1999 or e-mail [info@healthfirsteurope.org](mailto:info@healthfirsteurope.org).

\*Markos Kyprianou, European Commissioner for Health, noted in the First European Communicable Disease Epidemiological Report 2007, there are approximately three million HCAs and 50,000 attributable deaths in the European Union each year, and one in ten patients who receive hospital treatment acquires a HCAI. Health First Europe welcomes Commissioner Kyprianou's recent commitment that the Commission and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) will prioritise the issue in 2008.

There is much that can be done to tackle HCAs - as the ECDC noted in the report on communicable diseases, up to 30% of HCAs are preventable. Important measures include effective patient and staff screening and early detection of infections, more prudent use of antibiotics to minimise antibiotic resistance, the continuous professional development of healthcare workers and a more efficient transfer of information on HCAs to staff, patients, visitors and any other people who have reason to enter healthcare establishments.

Established in 2004, Health First Europe is a not-for-profit, non-commercial alliance of patients, healthcare workers, academics, healthcare experts and the medical technology industry. Its primary aim is to ensure that healthcare is regarded as a vital investment in the future of Europe and that every European citizen should benefit from the best medical treatments available.

As part of a series of awareness-raising activities, Health First Europe organises events and issues publications with the aim of communicating the following core messages to EU decision-makers and opinion leaders:

- There are weaknesses in European healthcare systems; a re-think is required in order to meet current and future health challenges;
- Patients and clinicians should have equitable access to modern, innovative and reliable medical technology;
- The development of new and flexible modes of healthcare delivery will benefit both patients and healthcare providers;
- "Health equals wealth". Health is a productive economic factor in terms of employment, innovation and economic growth.