Discussion Paper on Boosting innovation to meet the new demands in healthcare systems

Following the discussion of the meeting of the EP Interest Group on Innovation in Health and Social Care
Brussels, 28 November 2017
The primary aim of the Interest Group on Innovation in Health and Social Care is to improve patient access to innovation in health and social care by influencing EU policy. The group is supported in all its activities by Health First Europe and it is Co-Chaired by Members of the European Parliament:

- Cristian-Silviu Busoi (Romania, EPP)
- Marian Harkin (Ireland, ALDE)
- Karin Kadenbach (Austria, S&D)
- Dr. Kay Swinburne (UK, ECR)

The working group’s principal objectives include:

- Ensure public health is a European Parliament priority;
- Ensure innovation is prioritised on the EU health and social care agenda;
- Raise awareness of patient-centric solutions for sustainable, accessible and resilient health systems;
- Foster concrete actions for change;
- Seek broad support from MEPs for implementing innovative solutions for patients and healthcare professionals.

The Policy Objectives include:

**Research**: Encourage EU research activities to include formal study on how to value innovation for patients by looking at patient needs and demands;

**Health promotion**: Prioritise the implementation of innovations that support health promotion for citizens, including initiatives that encourage health literacy, prevention, early diagnosis and personalised screening and treatment to support well-being;

**Public Health**: Support cross-sectoral policies/initiatives that promote patient-centric care, innovation and value, access and reimbursement, care and treatment, and quality care and standards in community settings.
New demands in healthcare systems

Recognizing that health workers are integral to building strong and resilient health systems that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets related to nutrition, health, education, gender, employment, and the reduction of inequalities.

WHO, Global strategy on human resources for health: Workforce 2030, May 2016

Healthcare is highly labour intensive and one of the largest economic sectors in the EU – accounting for around 17 million jobs (8% of all jobs). Population growth, ageing societies, and changing disease patterns are expected to drive greater demand for well-trained health workers in the next 15 years. However, according to the WHO, today health workforce imbalances and shortages are major concerns in Europe. Although the number of physicians and nurses has increased in the region by approximately 10% over the past 10 years, it is unlikely that this increase will be stable and sufficient to cover the future needs of the sector.

In this vein, the European health system requires a deep reconstruction to ensure its sustainability: ageing society, the rise of chronic diseases, increased demand for primary care and personalised lifelong care are causing economic stress on health systems and their workforce. According to the OECD analysis, health spending in Europe will become unaffordable by 2050 if policymakers fail to reform the current systems via new structures, delivery models, processes, services, financial mechanisms, and workforce planning and skills development.

The increased workload in care results in a growing need for structural changes of healthcare and for the promotion of primary care solutions. Rethinking healthcare systems has thus become a priority. Truly patient-centred systems need to be developed around the person. It is necessary to shift the focus from acute care episodes towards a person centred pathway. Patients should be cared throughout their lives in a community setting, and screening and prevention programmes need to be available for healthy people. Improving the performance of primary care systems is perceived as an important challenge by a majority of EU Member States as a strong primary care system is proven to reduce unnecessary hospitalisations, increase population health and, ultimately, make the system financially sustainable in the long run. Health workers are the backbones of primary care solutions. Their role is essential to make the system innovative and contain health care expenditure. As a vital segment of health delivery, they should be concretely engaged in the decision-making process of the healthcare reform, more connected via digital technologies and more involved in ambitious training programmes to ensure a successful delivery of care.
Preparing health professionals and organisations for a sustainable integrated healthcare

The provision of integrated care implies vital changes in the healthcare structures. It means to redesign the organisation of workflows, workforce development, education programmes and resource allocation.

- Organisational change

New organisational arrangements should be in place to implement more coordinated and integrated forms of care provision as opposed to current “in-silo” delivery of health and social services. This implies: horizontal integration and collaboration among general practitioners and other health and social care providers; building partnerships and cross-sectoral cooperation of health and social care providers to establish standards assessments; technical and clinical protocols to introduce integrated care pathways; streamlining the management of health problems across prevention, acute care, rehabilitation, chronic and palliative care to ensure a continuum of care. The redesign of professional roles and the provision of new or extended roles for health and social care professionals also enable the implementation of integrated care. Current pilot projects have shown the urgency to include social workers in healthcare settings for encouraging integration between care levels and areas, introduce new roles (case managers), and establish integrated, co-located health and social care teams, with a strong emphasis on multi-professional leadership and development. It is critical to engage a larger community of stakeholders including practitioners and leaders from the services, but also families and informal caregivers. The family and informal caregivers possess a more complete understanding of the patient’s circumstances and needs and, therefore, they are in a privileged position to support the health workforce.

- Transforming educational models

The need for a specialist primary care workforce, characterised by a comprehensive and patient-centred orientation (rather than a disease-specialist approach), requires significant investments in post-graduate training programmes on primary care. A body of evidence shows that changing the scope of practice for nurses brings several advantages, specifically for the management of long-term conditions. With appropriate training and ongoing support from primary care practitioners, nurses have provided as much high-quality care as primary care doctors in the provision of care for acute and chronic conditions, and brought about higher patient satisfaction. An expanded scope of practice for nurses already exists in several European countries. Additional training has been developed for nurses to be involved in post-discharge protocol, patient education and chronic disease management. Expanding the role of community pharmacists is another avenue to renew the focus on preventive health care. Therefore, investing in and broadening the role of nurses or community pharmacists is an important policy lever that European countries could pursue to provide both more preventive health care and better management of long-term conditions. In order to avoid fragmentation, all health providers, such as physicians, public health
practitioners, nurses, midwives, health care assistants, community practitioners, pharmacists, therapists, social workers, therapists and many others, should work together to put people at the centre. Educational institutions can foster a multidisciplinary culture among prospective health professionals by setting standards for team-based care through multidisciplinary learning during initial theoretical and practical education. Boosting professional development is critical to optimize the use of appropriate technology, including: e-health platforms that enable measurement and management of individual clinician, practice and system-wide performance on clinical processes and outcomes, e-prescription and electronic medication management, computer and web-based screening, assessment, and intervention tools.

- Incentivising innovative care solutions

Integrated care relies on innovation and requires new tools, procedures and protocols to develop efficient provision of care.

- Workflow efficiency

Improving efficiency in the healthcare setting should be a priority. Rushing a surgical procedure can result in a higher complication rate and less desirable outcomes that will affect the overall performance. Improving efficiency in the operating room needs to be a multistep process that can result in the ability to help more patients per day while maintaining a high degree of safety and achieving excellent outcomes. Workflow mapping is a way of making the invisible “visible” to look for ways to improve processes to increase efficiency, reduce errors, and improve outcomes. Creating a workflow map enables to see what is currently happening, identify opportunities for improvement or change, and design new, more effective processes. When redesigning workflow, it is essential to have all key players involved in the process. The frontline staff who are currently or will be implementing the workflow will have recommendations and ideas for how to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. It is rare that a workflow is completely independent from other processes in the practice. In most cases, workflows on one activity will overlap with or depend on the execution of another activity or process. It is thus important to identify and consider these bonds when redesigning workflow, as consequent effects can be positive or negative. Modern IT solutions and digitally networked medical devices have the potential to improve the workflow in operating theatres if the effective networking of such devices is assured by standardised communication protocols. When properly conducted, a workflow analysis reveals important information on what occurs within an organization. The analysis of key processes and tasks involved helps organizations to increase productivity by eliminating redundancies and identify activities necessary to optimize ward efficiency while maintaining high standard of care.

- Remote monitoring and care

Hospitalization for heart failure (HF) is a serious clinical issue that is associated with a significant economic burden. It is estimated that between 1% and 2% of the total national health care budgets in many developed countries is spent on HF, with more than 60% of this cost related to hospitalization. Therefore, exploring ways to keep patients out of hospital is necessary. Advances in wireless technology have seen the development of sophisticated remote monitoring systems for cardiac implantable electronic devices. This functionality enables
devices to be interrogated remotely, thereby improving efficiency and reducing the burden of device checks and follow-up assessments. Such monitoring means that clinical- and device-related issue can be identified earlier and appropriately managed. Enabling more sustainable health systems’ reduces healthcare resource use and can cut healthcare costs by reducing both scheduled and emergency hospital visits and patient-incurred costs. Each year European healthcare systems spend between 40,000 and 80,000 per patient on dialysis (depending on country and strategy). Home dialysis can reduce the need to travel to a clinic and offer people the freedom to pursue work, study, and family life. It also offers a safe alternative to hospital-based care as well as reduces number of hospital appointments.

Providing supportive policy frameworks for healthcare workforce

Fostering primary care and other community-based services requires multi-level efforts. Investment in a right skills-mix of health workers is indispensable for effective and sustainable healthcare reforms. The growth of new technologies, new medical equipment and diagnostic techniques requires technical know-how in addition to clinical knowledge. Specifically, new skills on innovative technologies and eHealth solutions could effectively tackle the rise in chronic conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease among the elderly.

For any healthcare reform to succeed needs to recognise the following elements:

- Involving healthcare workers in the discussion and decision-making process as vital segments of healthcare delivery;
- Building highly specialized care capacity through structured postgraduate training exchanges as a cross-border cooperation activity;
- Increasing the skill set of the profession to deal with innovative technologies and eHealth solutions could effectively tackle the rise of chronic conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease among the elderly;
- Supporting successful integrated care initiatives with political and financial support from domestic authorities and/or the EU;
- Shifting towards more horizontal care skills. Such skill development will make workers more indispensable to the provision of community care and thus enhance their health career prospects;
- Engaging a larger community of stakeholders including practitioners and leaders from the services, but also families and informal caregivers;
- Using the grassroots experience of structured cooperation in highly specialized health care to inform macro-level policies when appropriate;
- Promoting the exchange of good practices in primary care as a way of inspiring health system actors to overcome health workforce challenges to the benefit of patients and health professionals.
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- Active Citizenship Network
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- European Medical Association
- European Union of Private Hospitals (UEHP)
- International Association of Patients Organizations (IAPO)
- International Diabetes Federation - Europe
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- International Patient Organisation for Primary Immunodeficiencies (IPOPI)
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- MedTech Europe
- Pelvic Pain Support Network
- The Heart Failure Policy Network
- The Medical Technology Group

Health First Europe is a non-profit, non-commercial alliance of patients, healthcare workers, academics and healthcare experts and the medical technology industry. We aim to ensure that equitable access to modern, innovative and reliable medical technology and healthcare is regarded as a vital investment in the future of Europe. We call for truly patient-centred healthcare and believe that every European citizen should benefit from the best medical treatments available.