

5. EUROPEAN HEALTH FORUM GASTEIN – on the Future of Health in Europe

25th to 28th of September 2002

**Spezial Interest Session:
The health Sector as Economic Growth Factor**

Health as an economic factor

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The current debate on the development of the health sector often focuses – both on a national and an international level – on the high costs and the ability to finance them. This reflects an approach that looks at the health sector from the perspective of public budget. Although this issue is obviously very important, we must assess the economic value of the health sector from a much wider perspective. In the workshop “The Health Sector as Economic Growth Factor” at the 5th European Health Forum Gastein, international participants discussed this issue on Friday, 27 September 2002.

When looking at the health sector from an economic point of view, its importance is reflected in the fact that a considerable share of the resources of a national economy are devoted to the production of the good “health” in response to the existing demand.

Studies commissioned in recent years by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations and carried out by an expert team of the Johannes Kepler University in Linz concentrate on the careful examination of the amount and the structure of resources used in the health sector. The findings of these studies, provide a most comprehensive and detailed description of the production activities in the Austrian health sector.

Using an input-output analysis, the studies explore the interrelations of the health sectors of the economy. In addition to the direct employment in the health sector, this method also allows the assessment of indirect employment in other sectors that can be attributed to the deliveries to the health sector.

The definition or delimitation of the health sector chosen in the above study is rather wide and is based on the definitions used by the Austrian Bureau of Statistics and the OECD. It includes the following “producers”: established physicians, hospitals, medical care, the pharmaceutical industry, the medical technology industry, and medical trade. The delimitation of goods is analogous to the above. The data collected by the Austrian Bureau of Statistics on a regular basis or at larger intervals constitutes the basis for the time series presented in the study of the production and use of goods and services in the health sector. These mainly include national account or input-output data, although several other statistical sources were also included, such as sector analysis, foreign trade statistics, short term statistics, etc. In many cases the study included unpublished or not yet published material. Efforts are currently

undertaken to apply this method of analysis on an international level in cooperation with EU partners in the Standing Committee of Hospitals of the European Union.