

7. European Health Forum Gastein 2004
„Globale Herausforderungen für die Gesundheit
Europäische Zugänge und
Verantwortlichkeiten“



Visions for Europe's Health

**Prim. Prof. Dr. Günther Leiner, President of the
EHFG**

**David Byrne, EU-Commissioner for Health and
Consumer Protection**

**8 October 2004 at the Congress Centre
Bad Hofgastein, Austria**

Internationales Forum Gastein
Tauernplatz 1
A-5630 Bad Hofgastein

Dr. Carmen Kiefer
Media Relations
carmen.kiefer@sbg.at
Tel: +43 6432 26138
Mobile: +43 676 344 9971
Fax: +43 6432 26138
www.ehfg.org
Fax Presscenter:
+43 6432 20992
+43 6432 26056

“It would be exaggerated to state that we could get global health problems under control from Europe. All of us know that it is hard enough to meet the challenges on a regional and national level. “However, we cannot afford *not* to attempt it”, said Prim. Prof. Dr. Günther Leiner today, Friday 8 October 2004, at the concluding press conference of the 7th European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). The largest European interdisciplinary health policy congress meets between the 6th and 9th October 2004 in Bad Hofgastein to discuss the main topic of “Global challenges for health – European approaches and responsibilities”.

Bird flue in Asia – a threat to Europe

The most recent example of global challenge has been the bird flue in Asia which already claimed 29 lives this year. With the allegedly first case of man-to-man-infection in Thailand there is more to worry about: “In times of increasing mobility, it is only a question of hours until a disease like that starts to rage in Europe. The measures taken to fight and control the epidemic which have been presented by the Taiwan Health Minister Dr. Chien-Jen Chen at the EHFG, are also an effective model for Europe, for instance, to further optimise our early warning system for infectious diseases or bioterror.” Furthermore, Europe can protect itself better if it shares its know-how with non-European countries for the battle against infectious diseases. “The international cooperation is primarily important”, said the EU Commissioner for Health David Byrne. “Though the Member States are prepared for an international super virus, there is still a lot of work to be done.”

Mental health – an unburied treasure

A further global problem and so far largely neglected are mental illnesses. Every day 2600 people commit suicide. The European Health Forum Gastein pushed the topic to the foreground in a parallel forum: "Physical diseases are taken seriously and are treated. Mental sufferings are, however, swept under the rug, ridiculed or played down. This still common ignorance in the public and in the health sector itself has to be paid dearly for, though", states Leiner. With relatively low funds for prevention and rehabilitation a treasure could truly be unburied: "If, for instance, a thousand dollars are invested in the timely care for the children of people with mental problems, an economic profit of 7.000 dollars could be achieved in the long run", Leiner quotes EHFG expert Eva Jané-Llopis.

Pills do not cure the soul

Need to catch up in mental health is given in Western as well as Eastern Europe. In the new EU-states, however, multiple factors accumulate: many people feel threatened in their existence due to radical social changes. Unproportionally many people flee into alcoholism, drug addiction or commit suicide. "People who cannot cope with life in a completely changed society cannot be merely helped with pills. They need professional accompaniment through life and benevolent encouragement", says Leiner. Unfortunately, it is primarily invested in expensive psychotropics. "The employment of the anyway scarce resources lacks an often necessary balance." Lithuania spends on average two to three million Euros to cover all expenses for up-to-date psychotropics. The expenses of one million Euros for preventive and rehabilitative mental care of children and adolescents are, however, not fully covered. That is why urgent psychosocial therapy approaches can hardly establish in the former Eastern bloc states.

Smoking Is Still The Major Problem

"One of the major problems in Europe is the fact that a lot of people are still addicted to nicotine", said Byrne. "We have to show especially young people that cigarettes are not a sign of 'cool' lifestyle at all." According to Byrne, the first achievements in the battle against smoking are the ban of tobacco advertisement within the EU and the all-out prohibition of smoking in Ireland. In two weeks time, the EU will announce the future guidelines for the prohibition of smoking: These include the establishment of information services which are to support smokers who want to quit smoking. "As a number of Member States already has such institutions, they are planned to be established in the whole EU", said Byrne.

New, But Expensive Drugs

The fact that the new democracies in the East have now access to the latest drugs from all over the world, has not only got advantages. In Hungary, the costs for pharmaceutical products use up already more than one third of the national health expenditures. The Hungarian Secretary of State for Health Imre Holló complains that the former states of the Eastern bloc are not yet experienced enough in negotiating with pharmaceutical companies. Although new developed products are expensive, they are not always therapeutically useful. "It was important to support only

innovative drugs. An EU-wide study showed that, within the last 22 years, only 0.3 percent of the 2693 medicaments approved in the EU could actually be successfully used in therapy", said Leiner. .

Quality As a Key to Economic Optimizing

The old and new EU Member States have to face the common issue of how to get a grip on the galloping health costs without restricting or deteriorating the health services. "It is a good idea to search for various possibilities of saving money. Yet we should bear in mind that nowadays patients are offered far more than ten to twenty years ago, and innovations are expensive", underlined Leiner. In other fields, there is not made such a big fuss about an increase in price: "The Germans spend a yearly amount of 133 billion euros on health. But they pay out much more money for cars, namely 174 billion euros. The quality of cars is constantly increasing and that is why people are willing to pay more." As mentioned in the parallel forum "On the Way to High-Performance Health Systems", qualitative improvements are actually the key to an economic optimizing of health systems. "If the qualitative level is high enough, e.g., a lot of malpractice can be avoided. Saving money reasonably does not necessarily involve leaving out things but rather invest in progressive aids."

The Increased Use of IT as An Opportunity for Savings

An increased use of information technology (IT) in the health systems promises success. Especially useful is the employment of computers in order to, e.g., identify patients running risk of suffering a stroke. Another field of application would be the control of diabetes: The system DIADEM makes it possible for the doctors to constantly control the patients' level of sugar and interfere as fast as possible in case of need. The figures that the patients enter into the computer twice a day, are available online. "This way patients can be treated perfectly and a lot of money can be saved by the system as well as by a single person.

The Principle of Solidarity as A Basis for Social Peace

It would be dramatic if we could not achieve any positive results through research. Global problems can only be encountered by putting the European basic values into practice, stressed Leiner. He warns of distancing ourselves from the principle of solidarity which has always been the basis for all European Health and Safety Systems. Due to this principle, Europe has always been successful, even if the so-called welfare state is in recent times considered as a load for the state and its citizens because of its costs. "What is the alternative way? Should we strive for a US American model, where the expenditures for health are higher than in any other EU or OECD country, and still people are not sufficiently looked after? Where illness becomes a trap for poverty? Prof. Martin McKee, one of our EHFG experts, reported that in the US 40 million people are not health-insured and that the situation of some of the Afro-Americans is by far as bad as the one of patients in Russia. According to Leiner, investments in health and social improvements proof to be a success – concerning not only people's capacity for work, but also social peace in Europe.