

**Lunch Workshop 4:
EU Health Strategy**



International Coordination in Health Policy Is Becoming Increasingly Important

- **Independent, national action ineffective in battle against pandemic**
- **“Joint health market” already reality**
- **Faster implementation of innovations through exchange of experience**

The European Union has set ambitious targets with its new health strategy. Merged with the issue of consumer protection and to be implemented in 2007-2013, the programme strives for a much more substantial degree of European coordination in health policy measures among member states. At the European Health Forum Gastein, the most important health policy event in the EU which is attended by leading experts from throughout Europe, Bernard Merkel, the European Commission’s Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General said “it is not a matter of European health policy but that health policies which are now the responsibility of individual states are to be coordinated more effectively than before.”

The reasons for this are manifold. First, it is clear that the battle against major health risks, namely the threat of pandemics such as the current example of bird flu, has no substantial prospects for success on a national level. “Global threats can only be countered in the scope of international cooperation,” says Merkel.

The second important reason is that a “single health market” is in many respects already a reality. “This was not a political intention, but instead a logical consequence of the unification of Europe,” says Merkel. “Patients have far more options today than in the past to consume health services abroad and medical experts are also taking advantage of the opportunities on the free labour market, which poses increasing challenges in medical care for several countries.” There are numerous problems as a result of this, particularly the question of who bears the costs of medical treatment abroad or who is responsible for the costs of medical malpractice which occur in treatments abroad. “If there is no European cooperation in this regard, there is at the very least a danger of serious complications.”

Furthermore, the EU-wide coordination of health policy measures provides new opportunities for quality improvement: innovations can be adopted faster in other countries, which will save not only on cost, but as a result of more rapid implementation of best practice standards, the quality of health services can also be significantly increased.

Finally, the EU health strategy also aims at strengthening patients’ rights and for stronger integration of civil society institutions in the health care system: “here there are enormous differences in the EU states, and particularly in the new member countries there is still an enormous need to catch up. In an area of such vital importance as health, we have to put the idea of European civil rights into practice,” says Merkel.

***Further information and abstracts from the lectures at the
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