



European Health Forum Gastein

Experts demand systematic implementation of ethical principles in the healthcare industry

The theme of the 11th edition of the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG), which took place in Bad Hofgastein from 1 to 4 October 2008, was “Values and Health – from Vision to Reality.” The conclusion of the expert panels, in which more than 600 leading representatives from the areas of health policy, health administration, medicine, science, industry and NGOs took part: there is unanimous agreement concerning the ethical principles around which the healthcare industry must be oriented – and in practice these principles are not or are inadequately implemented.

At the closing plenary session of the EHFG the attending high-profile representatives from international health policy – EU Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou, WHO deputy regional director for Europe Nata Menabde and several European health ministers – were confronted with the demand for orientation based on five fundamental principles which were defined by the experts who met in Gastein:

- General access to healthcare services
- Availability of high-quality healthcare
- Equality and the elimination of differences based on social status
- Solidarity
- Financial sustainability

For the issues addressed at the EHFG 2008 criteria were also defined on the basis of which it should be evaluated whether the demand for a value-oriented healthcare system is also reflected in the practice of healthcare systems.

- Transparency of political decision-making and social debate
- Clear areas of competency in the scope of health policy and administration
- Fair reconciliation of patient rights and public interest
- Just solutions for minorities, for ex. in the area of rare disease
- Access to cross-border health services
- Use of information and telecommunication technology in order to improve access to health services
- Qualification measures for those employed in the healthcare industry

“It is wonderful that experts from so many different interest groups were able to agree on a set of common principles and objectives,” says EHFG President Günther Leiner. “But having common principles is not the important thing; we actually have to live by them as well.” The application of ethical principles is indispensable to the healthcare industry, which in its essence cannot be bound primarily to material objectives.

This objective can only be attained if all the groups involved in the healthcare industry make a contribution. Leiner: “Ethical principles cannot be decreed, they have to become an overall concern. We need *leadership* at many levels so our healthcare system not only functions, but lives up to our social visions of humanity and justice.”

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