



Patient Safety: Healthcare Systems Must Learn More Quickly from Mistakes

- **Patients' organisations see medical errors at an unacceptably high level**
- **Good communication between health professionals and patients can significantly improve patient safety**
- **Knowledgeable and empowered patients are less likely to suffer from harm from a patient safety-related incident**

Patient safety has become a key issue in improving the effectiveness and quality of modern healthcare systems. For instance, this year alone nearly 400,000 deaths will occur in Europe as a result of venous thromboembolism (VTE), a condition that encompasses deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE). Among patients who survive, VTE is associated with significant long-term complications that not only have a dramatic impact on their ability to function, but are also associated with a tremendous cost burden. Statistics indicate that more patients die from VTE than from AIDS, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and road traffic accidents combined.

“This is an absolutely unacceptable level as there are risk assessments and treatments that can be used for prevention as many of these deaths are avoidable” said Jo Groves, Chief Executive Officer of the London-based International Alliance of Patients' Organizations (IAPO), at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) taking place in Bad Hofgastein, Austria, from 1 to 4 October.

At a workshop addressing patient safety with a focus on VTE, Ms Groves said that European health systems must learn more quickly from healthcare incidents. “Medical treatment is a high risk endeavour but what is important is that there are systems in place to prevent error, and in the event of an error the system picks up on it before it can cause harm to a patient. All errors should then be analysed and addressed so that the system learns and recurrence is avoided.”

However, Ms Groves sees some opportunities to sustainably improve the situation:

- **Education and training for doctors and medical staff: communication skills and training in how to create a cooperative relationship between the patient and doctor will lead to safer healthcare**
- **Open disclosure procedure: this shifts the focus from blame and defensiveness to one of open disclosure, learning and healthcare improvement**

Dinner Workshop 1

- Capturing the patient experience and learning from it. Empowering patients and families to be involved in the improvement process, thereby acknowledging that taking the perspective of patients and families into account is a useful validation tool for the implementation of guidelines, processes and protocols.
- Formal incorporation of patients' organisations in health policy making.

“It is the first priority of patients to contribute to a safe, quality healthcare system”, says Ms Groves. “Empowering patients does not make life more difficult for doctors and other medical personnel, but helps to improve patient safety.”

Press contact:

EHFG Press Office

c/o MB Dialog, Thomas Brey

Mobile: +43 / 676 / 542 39 09, Tel.: +43 1 917 51 18-25,

ehfg@mbdialog.at, www.ehfg.org