



EHFG 2009: Health Policy between Ethics and Finances

- **Health policy must be oriented around people's needs despite the crisis**
- **The economic crisis as catalyst for overdue reforms**

The economic crisis has considerably intensified the relationship between what is ethically desirable and financially possible. This is clearly demonstrated by the numerous events devoted to the subject of “Financial Crisis and Health Policy” in the scope of the 12th European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG), the most important health policy event for experts and decision-makers in the European Union. Around 600 participants in the areas of politics, health administration, medicine, science and NGOs took part in the four-day congress this year.

“Decision-makers in health policy and administration as well as experts in the medical and academic sphere recognised the need for healthcare to adapt to the changed economic circumstances,” EHFG President Günther Leiner explained at the closing press conference of the EHFG. “But it is also very clear that the decisions in health policy must continue to be oriented primarily around medical and ethical standards. Budgets provide frameworks, but money cannot be the predominating standard in questions of healthcare.”

Leiner does not view the crisis primarily as a threat to the standards achieved in healthcare, but as an opportunity to put through overdue reforms: “The healthcare system is similar to a reasonable diet, which does not weaken the patient, but makes him stronger: here an effective diet is overdue. It is not enough to know what has to be done; reforms must also be carried out, and if under the pressure of empty coffers we finally get rid of the excess fat in the healthcare system, then people will benefit from it in the long term.”

Leiner considers the measures for improving the efficiency of the healthcare system as an obligation for all decision-makers in the health sector: “If we don't want the necessary cost-cutting measures to be taken at the expense of people, then it is not the patients who have to make the sacrifice, but we who have to work more efficiently – even if several sacred cows have to be slaughtered for this. This is certainly the more difficult path, but the only right and justifiable one.”

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