



Press release: 13th European Health Forum Gastein, 6 – 9 October 2010

Austrian Health Minister Stöger at EHFG opening: Ensuring solidarity in the financing of healthcare systems

The ability to finance health care systems in Europe in the wake of the crisis has to be safeguarded. A rationing of health services is not an appropriate answer to economic constraints, Austrian Minister of Health Alois Stöger said today at the opening of the 13th European Health Forum Gastein. Demographic developments and rising life expectancy are wrongly estimated to be significant cost drivers, according to the Minister. A strategic approach: prevention in place of repair medicine. The Austrian Ministry of Health is initiating a debate at this year's EHFG on the sustainable financing of outpatient health care services.

Bad Hofgastein, 6 October 2010 – “The health care sector has been largely spared by the effects of the economic crisis in the vast majority of European countries,” Austrian Minister of Health Alois Stöger stressed at the opening of the 13th European Health Forum Gastein. “Through the financial safeguarding of health insurance funds, an important step was taken here in Austria toward making the health care system fit for the future. Sustainable protection of health care financing nevertheless remains a top priority in Austria and the rest of Europe as well.”

„Health in Europe – Ready for the future“ is the motto of EHFG this year. About 600 decision makers in the area of health policy, research, science, commerce and patients' organizations from over 40 countries are currently convening at the European Union's most important health policy congress in Bad Hofgastein, Austria to discuss crucial future topics related to Europe's health systems.

Rationing is no option – secure financial sustainability

The rationing of health services is not a theme in Austria nor, essentially, in the European aggregate, according to Stöger. “And I'll also do everything to make sure that the rationing option never becomes a theme.” An important condition in that respect is that health care systems remain sustainably financeable. The necessary steps toward that should not only be punctual and in terms of pilot projects, but widely applied and rapidly, comprehensively and sustainably implemented within a European consensus.

The Austrian Ministry of Health is adding to this year's EHFG a first class international discussion round on compensation and financing systems, especially in the outpatient area. Throughout Europe, existing models of financing and reward in the health service sector are being more broadly scrutinized in wake of the economic crisis. Innovative new models are being developed. Experiences with them are being exchanged and their potential transferability across health systems assessed. “More than ever, we ought to be copying good solutions from each other in Europe, instead of constantly reinventing the wheel,” Minister Stöger added in a plea for cooperation. The Minister called for better coordination of the multitude of projects and programmes at the EU level and for optimizing their practical results.

Demographic development not a substantial cost driver

Minister Stöger dismissed a popular preconception about one of this year's main themes: continuously rising life expectancy in Europe and the challenge to health care systems posed by aging societies. “Like many others, I am sceptical about claims that the demographic development really is one of the substantial cost drivers behind health care expenditures. Much more significant is medical progress from which all patients should profit, naturally.” More careful attention than before, therefore, should be given to the question of which patients require what type of treatment, the health minister opined. “We need to put more emphasis than ever on minimizing patient detours in the system and on avoiding erroneous treatments, not to mention as well the avoidance of supply-induced demand that lacks any recognizable benefit. Strategically, one of the most important tasks for the future is in promoting stronger sickness prevention rather than in simply improving ‘repair medicine’. In this area as well, Europe should be striving more energetically to close ranks.”

Opening plenary session: "Future health trends and the priority setting": Wednesday, 6 October, 2010

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