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Hungarian Minister of Health Szócska presents health priorities for upcoming EU presidency

The 13th European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) opened today in Bad Hofgastein. Discussions at the congress are centring on the future of European health care systems. Hungary's health minister Miklós Szócska explained his country's priorities in health policy for the upcoming EU presidency.

Bad Hofgastein, October 7, 2010 – “More pragmatism and efficiency in health care policy” is how Hungarian Minister of Health, Dr. Miklós Szócska, outlined to the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) a basic approach of his country as it prepares for the EU Presidency. Hungary assumes the rotating chairmanship of the European Council starting January 1st, 2011.

The EHFG is the most important conference on health care policy in the EU. This year it is attracting about 600 decision-makers from the fields of health care policy, research, science, business and patient organizations from more than 40 countries for discussions on the latest developments in health care policy.

“We will certainly move ahead with several of the core areas taken on by the Belgian presidency, but we'll do so with a special Hungarian flavour,” Szócska said.

European health care systems have been seriously tested by the economic crisis and influence of globalisation on markets. “Solidarity within and between the countries, efficiency and sustainability are the adequate answers here. There are a lot of issues that a nation simply cannot handle with its own resources.”

Szócska named the mobility of health care personnel as one of the core areas, among others, that the Hungarians want to tackle. In the new EU member states especially, migration or brain drain of qualified doctors or nurses presents a massive problem. A not insubstantial portion of healthcare personnel migrate to countries with attractive income and working conditions. Just as in the case of the work force, there is also competition for patients within the EU. The numerous Austrians who go for dental care in neighbouring Hungary are a classical example of the problem.

“We need a common framework for efficient pathways for both, patients and health professionals. This is a debate we want to initiate,” Szócska said. Efficiency is the current imperative not merely in regard to the issue of mobility of patients and health care personnel. It's crucial to a sensible application of scarce resources in general. “We have to make sure that investment in healthcare structures, as well as in health research programmes, are used in a reasonable way. We cannot afford waste.” The decision about the financing of healthcare projects should not therefore be driven by political considerations, but rather by substantive argumentation, the Minister maintained.

Szócska named inoculation as an additional further core issue. In Hungary, as in many other EU countries, the struggle against infectious diseases is being successfully waged. “We have splendid inoculation programs that assure against the spread of infectious diseases. But here too, of course, we are faced with new challenges.” The same inoculation standards and recommendations do not exist in the countries from which many migrants to Hungary originate. “Here too, we need more international cooperation and understanding,” the Minister counselled.

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