



EHFG 2012: DG Paolo Testori Coggi emphasises importance of optimised communication including Social Media to broader public and health professionals even in a period of cuts to health budgets

Even in a period of cuts to healthcare budgets, it is crucial that the Health authorities optimise communication efforts and gets the right messages across to the right people – both broader public and health professionals, said DG Paola Testori Coggi (DG SANCO) at EHFG. Citizens need to get armed with the right information on how to stay healthier for longer.

Bad Hofgastein, October 4, 2012 – “Many EU Member States feel under pressure to make cuts to their healthcare budgets; prevention efforts and health promotion too often take a back seat as regards priorities for health spending. Yet it is crucial that we optimise our communication and get the right messages across to the right people – both broader public and health professionals”, DG Paola Testori Coggi (DG SANCO) told European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). “Since communication can itself be a cost, getting the best value for money in health communication means integrating traditional media such as newspapers, TV and radio with the new media channels that the digital world has opened up, social media such as twitter etc.” Today, all major health players are communicating via social media - the health media, policy makers, NGO’s, industry and EU institutions.

“Crisis and Opportunity: Health in the Age of Austerity” is the motto of this year’s EHFG. More than 600 health policy decision-makers, research, science, industry and patients organizations from 45 countries are currently meeting at the European Union’s most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to discuss key issues for the future of European health systems.

iCoach gives help to the smokers to quit, 40 per cent of users reported they had stopped smoking

“We need to arm citizens with the right information on how to stay healthier for longer”, said GD Testori Coggi. The risk of many non-communicable diseases – accounting for 63% of deaths worldwide – can be minimised through simple measures: not smoking, not abusing alcohol, eating healthy food and taking regular exercise. These messages need to be communicated to broader public, Testori Coggi said. “And when people get sick, they should be fully informed about their treatments, medicines and also their rights. Informed patients are empowered patients.”

In some cases the Commission communicates to bring about behaviour change, said GD Testori Coggi: “We do this for example in partnership with our stakeholders in the area of nutrition and physical activity. As an example, the Commission has made a clip on physical activity for children; it will be launched later this year.”

By far the biggest EU-wide communication effort to bring about behaviour change is the „Ex-smokers are unstoppable“ campaign, which aims to curb smoking particularly in the 25 to 34 range. Particular help given to smokers to quit is the iCoach tool which 220.000 Europeans now seeking to stop smoking are using. After 3 months, many of iCoach users surveyed reported that they had stopped smoking.

A new step in this campaign is a joint communication initiative with Barcelona Football Club



called „Quit Smoking with Barca“ which will be launched in November. “This is an example of how striking the right partnerships can maximize the impact of communication initiatives”, said GD Testori Coggi.

HEIDI allows experts to share and compare the latest sets of data in real time

“Convincing policy makers to invest in health at a time when generating savings is the top priority, is probably the biggest communication challenge for health advocates. We need to co-ordinate with each other to make sure that we are all reading from the same page”, said GD Testori Coggi. The Commission recently launched a Wiki which aims to achieve precisely this. HEIDI standing for „Health in Europe-Information and Data interface“, allows experts to share and compare the latest sets of data in real time, across the whole of Europe.

“Alongside our traditional means of communicating, we are using new tools to meet the challenges of communicating in the digital age. In June we launched a Twitter account on health issues – „@_Health“ – in order to spread information rapidly about our health projects and initiatives, to follow trends and join conversations, to stay connected with other actors in the field and respond to questions in real time”, said GD Testori Coggi. “We have already attracted 800 followers with more arriving every day.”

Twitter proves to be a potent multiplier. For example, in July when „@_Health“ was just a pilot account with just over 400 followers, tweets about the Clinical Trials legislative proposal had an outreach of more than 200.000 people.

The EHFG is the most important conference on health care policy in the European Union. In this its 15th year, the EHFG attracts more than 600 decision-makers from 45 countries to discuss major topics on the future of the European health care system from 3 to 6 October 2012.

Please find photos of the European Health Forum Gastein using this link: <http://www.ehfg.org/940.html>.

EHFG Press Office

Dr Birgit Kofler

B&K Kommunikationsberatung GmbH

Ph. during the Congress: +43 6432 3393 239

Mobile: +43 676 636 89 30

Phone Vienna office: +43 1 319 43 78

E-Mail: press@ehfg.org