



EHFG 2012: European Health Literacy Project wins European Health Award

Well-informed people who take responsibility for their own health are less likely to develop chronic diseases, feel healthier and live longer. However there are major gaps in health literacy in Europe, according to experts at the European Health Forum Gastein. The European Health Literacy Project was presented today with the European Health Award. The project demonstrates the social and political importance of health literacy and seeks to identify ways to promote it.

Bad Hofgastein, 3 October 2012 – The European Health Literacy Project (HLS-EU) won this year’s prestige € 10,000 European Health Award from a shortlist of six trail-blazing cross-border health projects. “On behalf of the research consortium of the European Health Literacy Project I am delighted to express our gratitude for receiving the European Health Award 2012”, said HLS-EU coordinator Kristine Sørensen from Maastricht University. “The health literacy challenge in Europe is an inconvenient fact as 47% on average in eight European countries are estimated to have insufficient or problematic levels of health literacy. With limited health literacy people have difficulties in accessing, understanding, appraising and applying information to take health decisions in everyday life and in using health services appropriately. The Award rewards us for our widespread collaboration and dedication for manifesting health literacy in Europe through research and advocacy”.

Disadvantages from limited health literacy

The European Health Literacy Project (HLS-EU) has assessed the current state of affairs in this key competence in eight European countries. There are marked differences in levels of health literacy between countries, but also within states. Certain sub-groups within populations are at greater risk, such as the elderly, people with low levels of education or socio-economic status, as well as those who report suffering bad health. In some groups over 60% are vulnerable. Limited health literacy has wide-ranging consequences: People with poor health literacy are hospitalised more often, are more likely to receive inappropriate treatment or prescriptions, and are less inclined to take preventative measures.

“We have measured health literacy in Europe, established a European health literacy network and provided national advisory bodies on health literacy in eight countries. The Award acknowledges the societal impact of our work and motivates us to continue the efforts for overcoming the health literacy challenge in Europe. We thank the European Health Forum Gastein for this support”, said Kristine Sørensen.

Promotion of cross-border health projects

Sponsored by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Health and FOPI, the Austrian association of research-based pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, the European Health Award honours projects and initiatives aimed at improving healthcare in Europe. The main criteria are that more than one country must be involved and that results must be transferable to other states and directly benefit a substantial part of the population or relatively large patient groups.

“The point of this award is to encourage intelligent, workable initiatives and ideas that lend themselves to effective trans-national cooperation,” said Prof Dr Günther Leiner, founder-



president of the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). “The European Health Literacy Project fulfils these criterias in an exemplary manner. More than ever before, people must take personal responsibility and make their own decisions on health issues. This includes, for instance, understanding recommendations relevant to one's own health and complying with them, but also the ability to discern which data are relevant, reliable and of high value – which is not an easy task considering the flood of information. Promoting health literacy also contributes to an efficient and effective use of health care resources.”

The 2012 European Health Award shortlist included projects covering a wide range of topics such as breast cancer, epidermolysis bullosa, diabetes, paediatric nutrition and tobacco taxes.

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>.

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