CME Credits in Europe: An obstacle to mobility?

Michl Ebner, an Italian Member of the European Parliament (MEP), recently addressed the following written question to the European Commission. In order to provide you with a complete overview of this issue, we reproduced the texts of the question and answer in full:

| The Commission is aware of the fact that Continued Medical Education (CME) can differ greatly between the different Member States. Not only with regard to its compulsory character but also the ways in which it is implemented and organised. However, the Commission is not aware of the fact that some Member States are currently making use of the American CME Credit system for the mutual recognition of CME courses in Medicine and Physics. Currently, CME credits cannot constitute an obstacle to doctors wishing to establish themselves in another Member State, since the recognition of medical qualifications under Directive 2005/36/EC is based on harmonised minimum training requirements and automatic recognition of medical qualification titles. Member States may impose continued professional development on professionals established on their territory. However, they cannot require it for the purpose of migration, be it on a permanent or temporary basis. The introduction of a binding system of recognition of CME could only be based on minimum harmonised CME standards, in order not to prejudice the automatic recognition of medical professional qualifications. This would require unanimity among all Member States. Nevertheless, the Commission welcomes initiatives taken by and between stakeholders, such as the European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME), established by the Union of European Medical Specialists (UEMS), which facilitates recognition of CME events throughout the European Union and helps to bring about more transparency and comparability of CME at national level.”

The UEMS Executive is encouraged by this recognition from the Commission of the importance of the EACCME. This acknowledges the considerable contribution of the EACCME over the last 8 years. The UEMS looks forward to continuing close cooperation with the European Commission and Parliament to ensure that we achieve high standards of CME for all European doctors.
European Parliament

EU takes moves to handle issues related to organ donation and transplantation

The European Parliament recently adopted a resolution proposing measures to handle the issues of organ shortage and organ trafficking. The EP asserted that organ donation has to remain “non commercial” and that the Commission, Europol and Member States must take measures against organ trafficking and “transplant tourism.”

Improving information for European Citizens

The EP proposes creating a European donor card in addition to existing national cards. A card should also be made available for European citizens who are not suitable donors. The resolution also proposes the appointment of a legal representative who can decide on organ donation in case of one’s death. The Committee which elaborated this resolution emphasised that “a very effective way of increasing organ availability is to provide more information to the public.” An information hotline in each Member State, managed by the competent agency should therefore be created, in order to make information about organ donation available 24/7.

European cooperation

The resolution in question also calls for an enhanced cooperation between Member States to fight organ shortages. The EP supports reinforced cooperation between Member States leading to increased organ sharing between EU Member States. The report highlights that such cooperation would benefit especially to small Member States which have restricted donor population.

Fostered research

MEPs also encourage the Commission to promote research in biotechnologies which “may offer the possibility for researchers to grow organs from existing tissues and cells, either from the patients themselves or from other tissue donors”.

Irish private health insurance loses in court

The Court of First Instance (CFI) recently ruled against Bupa, an international company of private health insurance, in its case against the Irish government.

Bupa complained about a health plan providing that the insurance companies assuring below-average risks must compensate the companies assuring higher risks. This thus obliged Bupa to pay the state-owned Voluntary Health Insurance Board (VHI) which assures more elderly patients. Bupa considered that it was an illegal subsidy thus distorting free competition. The European Commission and the CFI ruled that these payments were justified since they enter within the framework of the Services of General Economic Interest whose definition remains largely in charge of the Member States, especially in regard to health care. Quinn, the company which overtook Bupa’s Irish operations last year, declared that there remained many issues concerning free competition which support the dominant status of the VHI.

Postponement of EMF directive confirmed

The European Commission’s proposal (2008/46/EC) modifying directive on physical agents and electromagnetic fields (2004/40/EC) was formally signed by the European Parliament and the European Council on 23rd of April 2008. This controversial directive will then be delayed for four years until 30th April 2012 to allow to the European Commission to carry out a comprehensive impact assessment of the directive and a broad stakeholder consultation.

This decision was welcomed by the Alliance for MRI, which was established to bring together representative organisation of patients, professionals and the industry to address this issue. The Alliance committed itself to continuing to contribute and monitor the work done by the Commission.

See also UEMS News 2007/04
European Commission

Newly appointed Health Commissioner announces draft directive on health services in June

The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) recently approved the new European Commissioner for Public Health, Food Safety, Animal Health and Welfare Ms Androula Vassiliou further to the resignation of Mar- kos Kyprianou who left the position to enter the Cyprus government as minister for Foreign Af- fairs.

Ms Vassiliou has a sound educational and professional background in Law and some knowledge of European politics thanks to her position of ex-first Lady, her husband G. Vas- siliou being President of Cyprus from 1988 to 1993. More interestingly, she chaired for five years the board of trustees of the Cyprus oncology centre before stepping down to take up her new position in Brussels. Her commitment to the oncology centre is said to have prepared her in addressing the public health dimension of her new job.

During her auditions in front of MEPs, Commissioner Vassiliou was re- ported to have made a good impression by her command of the issues at stake. Tellingly, one of her first official speeches was on combating cancer. Other public health priorities also included mental health, organ donation and citizens’ rights in cross-border care. Addressing the European Parliament (EP), Ms Vas- siliou announced that the long-awaited draft direc- tive on cross-border care will be released in June. This draft directive should be part of a “social pack- age” prepared with the Commissioner for Employ- ment and Social Affairs Mr Vladimir Spidla. See also UEMS News 2007/06

The hearing on the future of the health sector was organised in the Commit- tee of the Regions (Brussels) on 6th of March 2008. On this occasion, participants highlighted several important chal- lenges. One of the main challenges underlined by this hearing was the complex nature of free movement both for patients and health profes- sionals. As regards the medical profession, while the harmonisation of the quality medical training was positively underlined, the medical brain drain from central and eastern to western European coun- tries was seen as a source of major concern. The un- derlying question to be addressed in this respect encompassed the attrac- tiveness of medical prac- tice to avoid brain drain but also to attract students in all EU Member States. For patients, the complex- ity was pointed out in find- ing ways to allow a genuine freedom of movement while avoiding risks of “health tourism”.

I am sure that nobody is against the principle of improving legal clarity and transparency on an existing right under the treaty, or against the objective of improving patients’ access to healthcare.
EVENTS ANNOUNCEMENT

Systems Biology of Cancer - Signaling Networks, Modeling and Clinical Implications
2nd-3rd September 2008 - Rehovot, Israel
More information on http://www.weizmann.ac.il/conferences/SBC08/

Internet of Things - Internet of the Future
6th-7th October 2008 - Nice, France
This conference -organised as part of the French Presidency of the European Union- will cover topics related to the development of the Internet of Things in the wider context of the international debate on the Internet of the Future and the trends and developments regarding the mobile Internet.

PUBLICATIONS

Horizons in Medicine
Each year the Royal College of Physicians organises a conference aiming at giving an overview of the recent developments in several medical specialties.
On this basis, the RCP elaborates a publication available on command on http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/pubs/brochure.aspx?e=243

Climate change
The British Medical Association (BMA) published Health professionals taking action on climate change, a web based resource which calls on health professionals to take a lead in tackling climate change.
For more information visit http://www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/climatechange

Eurohealth
Eurohealth is a quarterly publication issued by LSE Health (London School of Economics and Political Science) that addresses health policy issues and aims at contributing to a debate on health policy in Europe.
More information and publication on http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/LSEHealth/documents/eurohealth.htm

European agency for safety and health at work
The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work released a report Expert forecast on emerging psychosocial risks related to occupational safety and health. This report points out a number of risks which could be impacting workers’ health.
To consult this publication: http://osha.europa.eu/publications/reports/7807118

Journal of CME for health professionals
The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions is the official journal of The Alliance for Continuing Medical Education, the Society for Academic Continuing Medical Education, and the Council on CME, the Association for Hospital Medical Education. It is a quarterly journal publishing articles relevant to theory, practice, and policy development for continuing education in the health sciences.