



In this issue:

- Stakeholders panel: How to address the need for a motivated, well-skilled health workforce?
- Parallel session: Promoting a learning culture of more patient safety and better quality of care
- Conference closing address and way ahead...
- What actions do we need for today and tomorrow?

UEMS contribution to the Belgian Presidency's Ministerial Conference on Europe's Health Workforce of Tomorrow

A high-level Ministerial Conference was held on 9th & 10th September 2010 under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union. This conference entitled "Investing in Europe's Health workforce of tomorrow: scope for innovation and collaboration" aimed to address major challenges European Member States are facing with regard to planification and needs assessment in the healthcare sector. This two-day conference gathered key decision-makers at European and National level, with the European Commissioner as well as a few Health Ministers present together with European stakeholders organisations.

The aim of this conference was to tackle the issue of healthcare workforce in the context of ageing population as well as increased pressures on healthcare systems. The main challenges Europe is facing nowadays lies in the need for European health systems to continue to deliver good quality of care despite strong financial shortcuts in budgets and demographic changes which will in the near future create unbearable tensions.



Mr Frédéric Destrebecq - UEMS Acting CEO

Dr Zlatko Fras - UEMS President

Dr Bernard Maillet - UEMS Sec.-Gen.

Keynote speakers addressed the audience and stressed the importance of a European approach as regards healthcare workforce. The UEMS President, Dr Zlatko Fras, and the UEMS Secretary-General, Dr Bernard Maillet, were among the speakers invited by the Belgian Presidency to bring their contribution to this conference, respectively on the panel of stakeholders as well as within one of the parallel sessions.

All participants generally agreed on the urgency to develop a clear strategy as regards the European healthcare workforce to face the common needs. In his speech, the European Commissioner in charge of Health John Dalli welcomed the European-based approach as regards healthcare workforce which is "essential to ensure that European citizens receive safe and good quality healthcare". Laurette

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Continued on page 2

!!! REMINDER !!!

The meetings of the UEMS Board & Council will be held in Prague from 7th to 9th October 2010.
Further information is available on page 4.

Stakeholders panel: How to address the need for a motivated, well-skilled health workforce?

- *Zlatko Fras advocates for harmonised competence-based standards of medical training*

When addressing the Stakeholders' panel at the Ministerial Conference, the UEMS President Dr Zlatko Fras pointed to the general challenge of maintaining patient safety and high quality of care through an efficient, competent and motivated workforce. In his view, this was best achieved through a harmonised, pan-European, competence-based standards of medical training.

For that purpose, the UEMS defined three key areas of interest: Postgraduate Training; Continuing Medical Education and Professional Development; as well as Quality Assurance in specialist practice. Underpinned by its Specialist Sections and European Boards, it had already established a common framework for the accreditation of CME-CPD, namely the EACCME® ("European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education"). Similarly, the UEMS is establishing a framework for the assessment and certification of individual specialists through the implementation and coordination of EU-harmonised training standards, ie. the ECAMSQ® ("European Council for Accreditation of Specialist Medical Qualifications"). This project is based on the examinations and assessments that are already taking place at the EU level with the issue of European diplomas as quality indicators. This principle will be extended by means of an e-platform in order to address



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Dr Zlatko Fras
President of the UEMS

doctors' knowledge, skills and professionalism on the basis of harmonised standards.

These activities are particularly timely seeing the current political context and the discussions on cross-border care, patient safety and professional mobility. Dr Fras' recommendations to address these challenges encompassed:

The revision of directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications to update and particularly reconsider the provisions on medical education and training in order to encompass lifelong learning as well as take into account quality standards.

The establishment of a European Observatory which would be in charge of the collection, monitoring and analysis of data and knowledge.

The creation of an exchange platform with the involvement of stakeholders.

On the way ahead, a certain number of obstacles were iden-

tified. These ranged from the lack of consistent data, the fragmentation in action and decision-making due to shrinking resources. The adherence from Member States' authorities was also pointed out.

In the discussion that followed, speakers advocated greater flexibility and cooperation in the training of professionals, and this in particular to ensure greater attractiveness of jobs in the healthcare sector. The issue of cooperation and interrelation between the various healthcare professions was also raised.

By and large, people called for increased professionalism and greater cooperation between authorities and stakeholders. The importance of the professional qualifications directive was once again highlighted, particularly in view of its revision which was hoped to reflect the changing patterns in the healthcare and education worlds.

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Continued from page 1

Onkelinx, Deputy Prime Minister and Belgian Minister for Health, also advocated for an active involvement of all stakeholders to

"identify today the needs of tomorrow and the best way to meet them not only at national but also at European level".

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Mr John Dalli
*European Commissioner
for Health*

Ms Laurette Onkelinx
Belgian Minister for Health

Parallel session: Promoting a learning culture of more patient safety and better quality of care

- Bernard Maillet points to harmonised accreditation standards to ensure quality and safety of care

In the framework of the Ministerial Conference, the UEMS through its Secretary-General Dr Bernard Maillet, was invited to address a Parallel Session on “Promoting a learning culture of more patient safety and better quality of care” on the issue of “European Accreditation : Harmonisation towards improved quality of care for European citizens”.

Dr Maillet opened his talk by emphasizing the background of a medical doctors’ life and its different phases in learning and training, namely: undergraduate; postgraduate specialist training; followed by lifelong learning throughout the professional life. He then raised the idea to develop credit systems based on different durations to improve and harmonise each of these three areas.

In a model of competence-based medical training, competence is made up of three key components, i.e. Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes. The ECAMSQ® (“European Council for Accreditation of Medical Specialist Qualifications”) being established by the UEMS is aimed at encompassing all these components in the assessment and certification of trainees by means of EU-

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Dr Bernard Maillet
Secretary-Gen of the UEMS

harmonised standards.

The first working model of European accreditation developed by the UEMS, namely the EACCME® (“European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education”), concerned CME-CPD. This model was built up following the principle of event-accreditation and more recently has developed to cover also e-learning modules. The purpose of this framework is primarily to facilitate access to international CME through developing common quality guidelines and credit system, thereby contributing to the quality and harmonisation of CME at the European level. In doing so, the UEMS-EACCME® ensures that the sovereignty of national

authorities is maintained, notably by means of mutual agreements. Such an agreement was also signed with the American Medical Association in order to provide for the transferability of credits between Europe and North America, and also globally.

Dr Maillet also addressed the mandatory vs. voluntary nature of CME in the different European countries. While participation in CME is encouraged as a professional ethical responsibility at the individual level, voluntary CME is often more effective on a macro-level. This issue was put in perspective by stressing the quality requirements and general financing of CME.



Conference closing address and way ahead...

“We have in common health systems based on solidarity, human values and concern for performance. This is mainly due to health professionals efforts”

In her closing speech of the conference, the Belgian Minister for Health Ms Laurette Onkelinx advocated for a common approach in the management of healthcare workforce considering that Member States face the same challenges.

The debates arising from this conference were seen as the starting point of an action which is to be contin-

ued. She proposed to elaborate an Integrated Action Plan focused on the added value brought by a mid- and long-term European-based approach. This Action Plan will “take into consideration the identification and evaluation of health needs as well as their impact on the needs for healthcare workers.” It also aims to ensure the quality of care by developing and updating professionals competence

through continuous professional development. This action plan will also formulate concrete proposals as regards the improvement of working conditions in the healthcare sector.

Laurette Onkelinx supported the launching of a Joint Action at European level to ensure that data regarding health professionals are collected and made available. She also insisted

on the implementation of the global code of practice for international recruitment of health personnel.

Mrs Onkelinx closed her speech thanking health professionals for their involvement in health systems and warned the audience against the consequences of a lack of concrete results for health systems in Europe.

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UEMS BOARD & COUNCIL MEETINGS (Prague, 7th-9th Oct. 2010)

These meetings will present an outstanding innovation with the participation from one representative of each UEMS Section and Board. This extension will as from now be applied further to the decision taken in Istanbul last year. As a consequence, the time schedule for the meetings was re-organised as follows:

Thursday 7th October 2010

11.30-12.30 Groupings of UEMS Sections
13.00-15.00 Plenary Meeting of the UEMS Sections & Boards
15.00-16.30 UEMS Working Groups
16.45-18.30 Discussion Forum

Friday 8th October 2010

8.30-9.30 UEMS Board
10.00-17.00 UEMS Council

Saturday 9th October 2010

9.00-12.30 UEMS Council



Practical information is available on the following website: <http://amca.cz/uems/>
Registrations to the meetings can also be made via this website.

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What actions do we need for today and tomorrow?

Dealing with such a complex issue as the “European workforce for health” is no easy matter. And this not only because of the difficulties to get to grip with its various components and their related issues of concerns but also because of the complex articulation of competences and means of action between the Commission and the Member States.

As a matter of fact, the EU added value on such complex issues lies with general coordination, possible joint action or exchange of information and best practices. EU action can also materialise in a certain number of other policy areas which are not directly related to health. In line with the philosophy of “Health in All Policies” -an initiative by the Finnish Presidency-, there is room for manoeuvre in mobilising forces, resources and expertise from these different policy areas.

Thus far, the initiative and determination from the Belgian Presidency to bring the issue of “investing in the healthcare workforce of tomorrow” need to be acknowledged. It is now hoped that the Presidency’s Conference leads to concrete outcomes and ambitious Council conclusions.

In 2006, the EU Council adopted Conclusions on “Common Values and Principles in European Union Health Systems” in which Member States pointed to priorities such as the access to safe and quality healthcare for their citizens. This was taken at the time as a true commitment from the Member States to guaranteeing essential components in the organisation and delivery of healthcare, particularly in a context of open cross-border care –at a time when the draft directive on patient mobility was under scrutiny.

Three years later, José Manuel Barroso, when applying for his re-election, presented political priorities in which investing in “green jobs” and “white jobs” would help sustain economic recovery and growth. By including healthcare professionals and social carers in his political programme, Mr Barroso indirectly addressed this most important policy area in the eyes of EU citizens.

Unfortunately, the healthcare sector lost importance one year later when the European Commission adopted its “EU 2020 Strategy”. This document was presented as a plan to get out of the current economic crisis and prepare the EU economy for the next decade through three key drivers, namely: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. While this document barely points to health or healthcare as such, the Strategy is divided into a certain number of key “Flagship Initiatives” addressing the different EC key areas of focus. And it is feared that such dispersion of resources and energy will lead to massive inefficiency and chaotic coordination.

When it comes to tackling the issue of the Healthcare Workforce, one needs to have real ambition and a clear vision. Such matter is far too serious to be overlooked. The medical profession therefore appeals to the Commission, the Member States and the Members of the European Parliament to keep the “workforce for health” high on their agenda for the next years. It is also crucial to address it with consistency and coherence, thereby avoiding its splitting up into many different policy actions. There is a clear risk of loss of momentum that healthcare professionals are not prepared to accept. Let’s be realistic and ask for the impossible!