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WELCOME NOTE

for the conference

"Cutting Edge Healthcare Quality for a Competitive Europe"

Health systems and health policies across the EU are becoming more and more interconnected. European integration and the free movement possibilities also lead to patients and professionals freely crossing European borders. Thereby they create the need for a policy debate and political answers on health care and the role of the European Union. I myself live in Saarland, a German region bordering France and Luxembourg. Many people in this region are travelling on a daily basis to a neighbouring country. They rightly expect being able to benefit from European integration, e.g. by accessing cross-border health care or by profiting from better health care quality achieved through an exchange of best practice examples and experiences in the health sectors.

The European Parliament attaches great importance to the social dimension of health care and thus strongly supports the approach of putting patients first and establishing a basis for more effective strategies of health promotion, disease prevention, diagnosis and therapy. In a resolution on the Commission's White Paper entitled 'Together for Health: A Strategic Approach for the EU 2008-2013' last year the Parliament recalled that health is one of the most precious things and its goal is to guarantee a high level of health for all. The EU is already providing the framework for good research as the starting point for quality health care, e.g. by offering funding through the Framework Research Programmes or by setting up European standards on licensing of pharmaceuticals or working towards strong pharmaconvigilance. A directive on cross-border health care is currently on the agenda of Parliament and Council. We, in the Parliament will strive to ensure a patient-centred healthcare environment focussing on patient's rights and safety as well as equal access to good health care. Prevention, transparency and reliable information, the promotion of healthy living as well as the protection of health care workers need to be at the core of common European actions.

Obviously, health policy is mainly a national responsibility and will, along with national health packages and systems remain that way. However, there is an added European value in cooperating on healthcare issues, e.g. with regard to eHealth, stronger cross-border collaboration, the potential of sharing efforts on health technology assessment or the development of instruments for health systems impact assessment. This kind of exchange can provide the EU with an edge in health care quality. Specifically, Parliament recommends the widespread adoption of the practice of performing health impact assessments and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle as a cross-cutting policy topic, including families, schools, hospitals, care homes, workplaces and places of leisure in our efforts for successful disease prevention and good mental health.

The vast majority of health care happens on the local level and will probably continue to do so as patients in general look for care close to their home. Thus local entities and authorities play a very crucial role for the implementation of better health care. Local circumstances and care approaches can vary widely and can be innovative and creative.

In order to achieve an improvement of health care quality in Europe it is therefore paramount that local authorities take the initiative and receive support for establishing contacts with each other, also across borders, to exchange their views and knowledge. In this process we need to ensure that patients are involved in health quality debates by providing them with concise information on efficacy and by building their health literacy so that they are properly equipped to participate and can contribute in a meaningful way with their experiences.

I sincerely welcome the work of the regions of Västra Götaland and West Sweden and their effort and initiative to organise this conference, which provides an excellent basis for sharing experiences and best practices. The Swedish health system is known for its commitment to quality improvement, a commitment that is not least based on the high priorities health care providers like today's organising regions attach to it, leading most effectively by example.

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