



EPHA Briefing Note

Subject	EPHA Briefing on the European Commission's Communication and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on Patient Safety, including the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections
Date	11/03/09

On 15 December 2008, the European Commission (DG SANCO) released a Communication and a proposal for a Council Recommendation that aims to address issues around patient safety, ranging from prevention of injury and adverse incidents to the control and prevention of healthcare associated infections.

Patient safety has received an increasing amount of attention recently from the European Commission. The important issue arising from the Communication and proposed Recommendation is how this would add value and contribute to the existing work on patient safety at national level?

The Issue

"Patient safety is a fundamental principle of health care. Every point in the process of care-giving contains a certain degree of inherent unsafety." (WHO)

Every time a patient enters a hospital or receives care in Europe they run the risk of experiencing an adverse event. Various national studies from Member States have revealed that large numbers of people suffer from care-related harm ranging from events involving medical devices to medicinal products. Overall, between 8% and 10% of patients experience an adverse event when admitted to hospitals in Europe. based on national studies, between 35-43% of these events have been deemed preventable.

The most common and perhaps the most serious adverse events, however, are healthcare associated infections (HCAIs). HCAIs affect, an estimated one in twenty patients receiving care in hospital, that's 4.1 million patients per year. These HCAIs represent a huge threat to human health and are a breeding ground for multi drug resistance in bacteria making some HCAIs hugely difficult to treat. An example of the difficulty faced in treating HCAIs is the 'superbug' MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus-aureus) that caused 1,629 deaths in England and Wales in 2005.

The Communication and Recommendation

The European Commission, in its Communication and Recommendation foresees EU added value by:

- collecting comparable and aggregate data at Community level, hence achieving economies of scale,



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- disseminating best practice among the Member States to establish efficient and transparent patient safety programmes, structures and policies,
- facilitating mutual learning among Member States by developing a common “language” or “taxonomy” for patient safety and common indicators,
- providing political weight and visibility to patient safety.

The Commission Communication recommends a comprehensive approach to improving patient safety. Member States are encouraged to put in place and improve strategies to prevent and control adverse events in all healthcare settings. The primary focus is on addressing systemic and organisational failures responsible for most harm to patients.

The Commission recommend for the Council and to member states:

- establishing or strengthening reporting and learning systems
- embedding patient safety in the education and training of healthcare workers
- involving patients in the development of safety measures and
- providing patients with relevant information on health risks and safety issues
- Member States are also encouraged to share best practice and expertise in this field
- the Commission will work with Member States to develop common definitions and indicators for patient safety.

The Member States are advised to set up or improve blame-free (constructive, rather than punitive or repressive) reporting and learning systems so that the extent and type and causes of adverse events are captured. This would enable resources to be efficiently channelled into developing solutions and interventions which can then be shared at the EU level.

More specifically in the area of HCAs the Council recommends to the Members States

- implement prevention and control measures to support the containment of HCAs
- enhance infection prevention and control at the level of healthcare institutions
- establish or strengthen active surveillance systems
- foster education and training of healthcare workers on infection and control
- improve the information given to patients and
- support research



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Implementation of the recommendation

- The EC will, where necessary, develop guidelines in close cooperation with Member States, including on the prevention and exposure of healthcare workers to healthcare associated pathogens,
- EC to develop guidance on best practice on the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections
- EC will promote the availability of training opportunities
- EC will assist MS assist to develop infection control training and curricula for infection control staff and healthcare workers
- the EC can foster with ECDC the development and implementation of surveillance of infection control structure and process indicators in order to evaluate the implementation of the recommended actions in the MS
- the EC can assist MS to establish or strengthen surveillance on healthcare associated infections

EPHA Opinion

EPHA supports the Commission in its endeavours to tackle this issue that is of the utmost importance. The Communication brings together the concerns of the healthcare community and the proposals for action at European level are well founded and will provide invaluable.

EPHA's concern is that this Recommendation will not be acted upon and is ignored by policy makers unwilling to accept the challenges in front of them, this must not happen. It is imperative that we move forward in the field of patient safety and that every effort is made to ensure that the health of Europe's patients.

The fact that we are talking about patient safety at all is a failure on the part of health systems throughout Europe; this endemic problem must be routed out. Patient safety should be a basic right for all citizens of Europe. We should be able to stop talking about safety and talk instead about quality and perhaps more importantly, equity. The other efforts currently being made by DG SANCO in this area could provide the area of patient safety with support, the green paper on health professionals, the PRD and the Commission Communication on health inequalities due out in 2009.