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Fighting Infection With Eunetips

Last October in Venice, Italy, 16 European professional and scientific societies from 14 countries involved in infection prevention and control formed EUNETIPS- a European network to promote infection prevention for patient safety. The goal of EUNETIPS to promote better cooperation among nations, to share experiences, to promote and support initiatives in infection prevention for patient safety particularly at a European level, recognising and making the most of all single member societies.

EUNETIPS promotes:

- Activities to prevent and control infection risks including patient and staff movement throughout Europe;
- Engagement of politicians, caregivers and individuals in addressing:
 - public health implications, and
 - challenges and opportunities related to infection prevention.
- Exchange of experiences and harmonisation of activities for both professionals and 'customers';
- Active partnerships in promoting patient safety in Europe; and
- Formal links, inter alia, with World Health Organisation (WHO), European Centre for Disease Control and prevention (ECDC), International Federation of Infection Control (IFIC) and other institutions and professional and scientific associations.
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European-Wide Collaboration

In Europe many scientific and professional societies exist to support research and to promote knowledge, attitudes, good practices and training on prevention and control of this risk. Although they have long history of successful initiatives, most of them are nationally based.

Indeed, there is certainly no shortage of HCAI prevention programmes developed by European countries. The problem is they are not connected and there is a clear lack of homogeneity due to differences in histories, healthcare systems, available resources and epidemiological settings. These differences are not easy to align, even if, in recent years, two European DG SANCO scientific initiatives (Improving Patient Safety in Europe (IPSE) and Hospital in Europe Link for Infection Control through Surveillance (HELICS) developed a European consensus on standardisation or harmonisation of surveillance methods, standards, indicators and guidance on infection prevention and control and training.

Bringing Scientific and Professional Associations Together

National scientific and professional societies in many cases do not have regular formal contact with each other, with the exception of participation in international activities such as scientific projects and congresses. This is a critical point, as throughout Europe there is a consistent untapped resource of experiences, knowledge, scientific skills and training opportunities that could be known, shared, and finally become part of a common platform.

Scientific and professional societies play an important role in complementing and enhancing actions, initiatives or recommendations developed at the national or European levels. Whilst professional and scientific organisations often serve different purposes for their respective membership, the unique opportunity to work together to develop, support and crucially implement and influence changes in practice through the network should not be underestimated. Medical, nursing and scientific network members can reach straight to a vast number of professionals both with meetings and publications, and have the ability to sense the climate in the field, giving them a unique opportunity to support programmes, to launch and monitor specific campaigns.

Recently, there have been some important EU institutional initiatives: The European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC) set up a specific team on Healthcare Associated Infections (HAI) and in 2009 European Commission published a Council Recommendation on patient safety, including the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections where HAI risk and ways to control it are mentioned specifically.

A number of European scientific and professional societies involved in HAI prevention are convinced that the present epidemiological situation, the frequency of HAI, and cross-border movements of citizens, patients and healthcare staff needs international initiatives, particularly at a European level. They believe that it is necessary to cooperate and to share their experiences in Europe considering it in a wider sense and not just on European Union political borders.

The Key Challenges in Infection Prevention in Europe

1. Patient Safety

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- Different infection prevention approaches throughout Europe;
- Patient and staff movement through Europe; and
- Compliance with infection prevention activities and education.

2. Public Health Implications of

- Individual clinical interventions; and
- National/regional policies.

3. Networking

- Exchange experiences and knowledge; and
- Defining priorities for action or research.

Initiating a formal network is considered the best way to start cooperation and collaboration because it requires members:

- To respect and to assume the value of histories, traditions, activities and specificities of the existing scientific and professional societies;
- To leave each country to evolve at its own pace and to respect local characteristics;
- To retain formal contact and to share initiatives and experiences, to promote joint projects, etc.;
- To guarantee mutual support both for critical situations and for specific needs;
- To be more effective in lobbying and advocating HAI prevention at the different levels (regional, national, international);
- To be more visible for the media, for public opinion and for the professional and scientific arena; and
- To make a wide spread network able to support work programmes, guaranteeing expertise, channels of communication and feedback available to the EU, ECDC, international institutions and other stake holders.

Full members are drawn from:

- (a) Professional and/or scientific societies based in Europe with a strong commitment to infection prevention for patient safety ;
- (b) A conglomerate (group) from a given European geographical area where no relevant European discipline or specialty association exists;
- (c) Professional and/or scientific societies based in Europe that, among the others, have an interest in infection prevention for patient safety without a formal subgroup; and
- (d) Regional, national or supranational institutions financed and/or organised on a state or governmental level that have a commitment to infection prevention for patient safety.

The network also includes corporate supporters that may be admitted from organisations representing manufacturers of products and commercial enterprises offering services for infection prevention in healthcare organisations.

This is Only the Beginning

This is a start. Seventeen professional and scientific societies from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Kosovo, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Serbia, Spain and the UK signed the statutes but at least three other countries have expressed an interest and are likely to join in the next few weeks. We want to engage as many societies as we can. At the moment the network has its legal domicile in Italy (SIMPIOS, via Farini n.81. 30 Milano info@simpios.org) and the website is managed by the German Society of Hospital Hygiene.

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