

Volume 14, Issue 3 /2012 - Editorial

We are Europe...

hi Politicians, artists and intellectuals from all over Europe called for a new “bottom-up foundation of Europe” with a manifesto published in the European press. In it, the group called for a voluntary year of social work, which they view as the answer to the current European crisis, in particular the crashing job markets which have hit some European countries so hard. In a way, this would allow John F. Kennedy’s idea of a Peace Corps to be applied to Europe – and it would also be a sign for active political participation, instead of handing over sole responsibility to politicians and technocrats.

In light of the cancellation of the European Association of Hospital Managers (EAHM) Congress in Athens, we have repeatedly called for actions of solidarity, as this is the only way in which a social Europe can continue or indeed be established. And it is the youth of today in particular who are in dire need of such a Europe as a sign of encouragement, considering the fact that by now every fourth European under the age of 25 is unemployed. This is the reason why we are happy to support this manifesto. It contains not just fine words but demands active participation as well. The EAHM assumes responsibility in this aspect. Without the framework of social security the entire social fabric would be under threat. Hospitals are important service providers of social security. Their place value may be more or less pronounced from one system to another and they might be under cost saving pressure, but the fact is that these hospitals offer an indispensable service to public health, especially in times when an increasing part of the population is at risk of slipping beneath the poverty line. It is the only way the social fabric can be rescued. And this insight is not only true for individual countries, but valid on an EU-level as well.

Up until now, the competence of public health systems was solely in the hands of national states. However, the obligatory implementation of the guideline on cross-border healthcare is a clearly visible indication that times are changing. In his opening statement at the European Hospital Conference (Dusseldorf 2011), Luxembourg’s Health Minister Di Bartholomeo stressed the impact of this guideline. It not only secures the right of reimbursement after claiming health services in other EU-countries, but also obliges national states to openly state the quality of the services offered, he said.

Without question it is not only health ministries that are under obligation, but any organisation offering health services, hospitals in particular. As the above-mentioned manifesto on the new bottom-up foundation of Europe demands, hospital managers now have the unique opportunity to actively participate in a Europe-wide process of securing both high-quality and transparent health services. As soon as the quality standards of each country are made public, it will not take long for comparisons or grading of strengths and weaknesses to follow. Indeed, nobody would be able to refuse a well-informed patient the access to transparent results and information.

Actively creating this bottom-up process is not only a matter of concern for the EAHM; rather, it is an obligatory goal. Following the opening conference at the MEDICA we invite all our members to a further seminar on 16 November 2012, in Dusseldorf. Based on concrete examples of how to deal with quality standards, we will aim to initiate a profound process of reflection that should act as an incentive for further work in the respective national associations and raise curiosity on how the European neighbour countries are coping. Suggestions compiled in the national associations would allow our members to introduce their input in the implementation of the European guideline, thus making us a good example for active participation in a ‘bottom-up’ Europe. We should focus less on the certainly indispensable, bureaucratic rules and more on the patient. It is the patient after all who is our foremost duty in the daily management of our hospitals. Now, it is time to deliver the goods as Europeans – from the bottom up.

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