

Overview of the key developments in Europe's health sector

As they move into a new century, policy-makers must meet the challenge of developing new foundations for their health systems. Therefore, bridging the gap between project design and study results to medical developments is vital, information and communication systems play a key role here.

The health systems must undergo change for several reasons:

- the greying of Europe's population
- the changing patterns of disease
- the development of new diagnostic, treatment, and information technologies
- increased expectations among citizens (in combination with the above-mentioned items) who demand to participate and call for excellent quality in health systems

All these factors combine to exert upward pressure on health expenditures. From a macro-economic standpoint, however, deficits must be accepted in order to remain competitive.

The future will bring the following changes:

- an improved prognosis of the impact of new technologies
- consideration of public opinion
- enhanced databases

The health system will need to react by correlating the role of the state with that of the market. Furthermore, the boundaries between private and public providers will disappear and the population will play more of an active role.

The costs are shifting to the consumer and the effects of cost sharing will entail a political discussion.

In addition, the role of public health will be strengthened and this involves information on the costs and performance of a system, providing information to and direct co-operation with politicians. This again means that policy-makers will not provide the raw data but the useful information gained thereof.

The provided services will need to become less expensive and payment systems performance-related.

Another task will be to strengthen knowledge networks, include information on changed habits, and call on those involved to change certain attitudes.

With regard to human resources, the demand for persons with a skill-mix, i.e. skills from various fields, will grow.

In communication, efficiency will be enhanced, resulting in higher speed, no superfluous analysis, and transnational contacts. Precisely in the latter named complex, international organisations such

as the WHO play a major role, not least because of its important role in collecting information, e.g. in databases and in passing on this information to policy makers.

(text by Inès Häufler)