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Between cost explosion and citizen-centredness - Debate on high disease costs, health inequalities and a sustainable development

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“Why do we tolerate high disease burdens, health inequalities and the social and economic costs of health crises and how do we ensure sustainable development?” – Those were the central questions discussed by politicians and experts at a debate of the European Health Forum Gastein. Genon K. Jensen, general secretary of the European Public Health Alliance, stood up for the definite target group of all health policy, the citizen. She especially focuses on the picture of the responsible citizen, who is able to act on his own behalf. Health policy have to concentrate on him and he should be positioned in the centre of all political strategies. The demands of the responsible citizen are the benchmark to evaluate the aims of health policy, his problems and the inequalities concerning the accessibility to medical care have to be the basis of all considerations.

The demographic situation of Europe strikes as being a familiar scenario: 25% of the European states have less than 5 million inhabitants as the latest statistics prove. Low figures like that should be a request for politicians to act more citizen-centred. It should be easier to work against social inequalities.

The Hungarian Member of Parliament and WHO-Consultant, Mihály Kökeny criticised the short-sighted and poorly reflected planning in health care, where the benefits for the citizens is left behind. “A statesman invests in the future, a politician does in re-election!” as he pointed out. A hospital is quickly built but there is often a lack in long-term planning and further investments.

The situation of German hospitals not being provided with enough money is contradictory to the situation in the USA, said Rolf Krebs, Professor of Pharmacy. There, he argued, the patients have to invest money for their health care on their own behalf, they have to meet the costs for medicine and hospital stays for themselves. Patients in Germany do not and their hospital stays take much longer and cause costs far too high, but these costs are not met by the patient. “This is how money for progress is lost”, Krebs criticised and demanded an absolute reduction of costs in this area.

Bernard Merkel from the European Commission for Public Health in Luxembourg conceded that it would always and in every system come to inequalities, mistakes and weaknesses, he conclusively calls to action: “We are not supposed to interpret the world, we are supposed to change it!”

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