

Media Information for the 7th European Health Forum Gastein 2004 (6th to 9th October in Bad Hofgastein)



plenary session 1

Global Health – The 21st century challenge

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International Forum
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„Europe has never had better health care than today“, said Anders Gustav, president of the health commission of the Committee of the Regions at the opening event of the European Health Forum Gastein on October, 6 2004. This year Europe’s biggest interdisciplinary health convention is held in Bad Hofgastein for the seventh time. This year’s motto is “Global Health in the 21st century – European solution in sight?”.

Difficulties with interregional utilization

Gustav delineates the difficulties and possibilities, which all European health care systems have in common: “The downside of good health care is that the gap between what consumers expect and what health systems can actually do is getting wider and wider. It will grow even more if we do not abandon traditional schemes of financing and providing health services. Talking about possibilities for economising, the interregional utilization of health care facilities is often mentioned. Fact is, however, that the interregional mobility of doctors, therapists and nurses is still complicated by administrative obstacles. On the other hand, patients are not sufficiently aware of the extent to which they can make use health care facilities which lie outside the borders of their own country. People have to be informed about the following questions: “In how far do they have a right to treatment in other EU-countries? What about cross-national reimbursement of costs?”, says Anders.

Survey of the global status of health

“It is not necessary to smoke every day. However, it is necessary to eat every day“, explains Dr. Marc Danzon, Regional Director for Europe of the World Health Organization. According to Danzon, the problem is still that not everybody has enough to eat. What is essential is a better distribution of food. Another global

challenge, according to Danzon, is the battle against AIDS. "It would be dramatic, if research did not yield any positive results", the WHO Regional Director for Europe emphasises. Global problems can only be faced if basic European values are put into practice, stresses Danzon.

Millennial Development Goals of the UN

"It is the poor of this world who dies early", says Dr. Jacques Baudouy, Director of Health, Nutrition and Population sector of the Human Development Network. An example: among the poorest the number of AIDS deaths is almost three times as high as in the other social strata combined. Thus, two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are that between 1990 and 2015 the percentage of those suffering from hunger should be cut in half, while infant mortality should be reduced by two thirds. There are already some half time results: the rates of both malnutrition and mother mortality have decreased. In order to achieve the Development Goals, international organisations and locals have to cooperate, says Baudouy. His appeal is that "we need networks".

Avoidable chronic diseases

Asthma, diabetes, cancer – in the year 2002 chronic diseases did already account for 48,8 percent of global mortality. Corina Hawkes of the International Food Policy Research Institute even fears that "by 2002 chronic diseases could account for 60 percent of deaths throughout the world". Throughout the world alcohol, tobacco and especially nutrition are among the biggest risk factors. On the American continent almost one in three children is overweight, in Europe it is already one in five. "Even if increasing incomes result in an increase in life expectancy, this economic development entails a higher risk for chronic diseases", says the nutritionist. With considerable consequences for the economy: in Sweden, for example, six percent of health costs is caused by diabetes. According to Hawkes, one solution consists in facilitating access to the market for small producers of high-quality food. Governments have to change their minds as well. Instead of "We grow now and treat the issue of health later!" they have to say: "The economy can only grow with good health!"

Worldwide NGO Perspectives

Female, pregnant, married with 14 – in India this is not a rarity. Not a trace of equality. "The socio-cultural reality is that women do not have access to education", reports Indu Capoor of India's Centre for Health Education. On the one hand, in the Indian society one does not talk freely about sexuality, on the other, the bad economic situation forces many girls to prostitute themselves. Because of the bad health care mother mortality is very high. "The rate of mother mortality is 28 times higher than in Europe", says Capoor. In order to change this, universal health insurance, focussing on topics like pregnancy and sexual health, should be established until 2015. "Naturally, the most important aim is to give women access to education". But Cooper knows that this cannot happen without global help. Europe should take the leading role in order to achieve the global development aims.