



Successful Response to Increase in Chronic Disease: Patient University Empowers Patients

- **Increase in chronic disease defines new role for the patient**
- **Newly established “Patient University” in Hannover teaches patients health literacy and coping capacities**
- **Physicians also learn: better communication competency and comprehensibility**

European Health Forum Gastein 2007, Austria. The ageing of society and the increase in chronic disease are becoming major challenges for the health systems of the 21st century. At the European Health Forum in Bad Gastein various strategies of health systems in their responses to these developments were presented. As one central point experts stressed the importance of individual empowerment and health literacy of citizens and patients.

In fact, the increase in chronic disease in a consumer-centred and aging society is associated with a new role for patients. Becoming emancipated partners in the treatment process, patients have to distinguish between a growing amount of adequate and unqualified health-related information. These new challenges can be overcome by enhancing the health literacy of patients by teaching them independent, basic medical knowledge as well as information about prevention, patient rights, supporting facilities and the health system.

The Patient University created recently in Hannover was presented at the EHFG in Bad Hofgastein. It addresses the present need for education with an innovative concept, consisting of the following different strategies and focus groups:

- An increase in health literacy – a strategy successfully implemented in the US for more than 10 years. The lectures cover organs of the human body including the anatomic and physiological aspects, dysfunctions and preventive and therapeutic potentials. In the courses, participants are encouraged to ask questions and expand their knowledge in dialogue with young physicians of the school.
- A strengthening of coping capacities – teaches patients and their family members as well as multipliers from self-help organizations about the application of clinical and care findings, in order to actively involve the patients in the treatment process and improve their quality of life.
- The teaching of system knowledge - addresses patient representatives on the boards of health systems.

“The Patient University is not only valued by the citizens, insured and patients who enhance their health literacy,” points out Friedrich Wilhelm Schwartz, Director of the Hannover Medical School; “physicians also learn that good communication with patients is a central medical task and that they can practice their speech competency and their comprehensibility.” The success of the Patient University provides well-founded hope that one day it will grow into a movement which also involves and effectively changes the self-image of medicine and

Forum 1: Chronic Diseases

physicians. The increasing participation of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the Patient University is planned for the future.

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Additional press information on the EHFG and pictures can be found at www.ehfg.org