



Press release: 13th European Health Forum Gastein, 6 – 9 October 2010

EHFG-President Leiner calls for European fund for older people – human dignity should not be dependent on area of residence – new charter for care for the most seriously ill and dying

Old age poverty risk: Every fifth person over the age of 65 risks poverty and in some countries more than half the population is at risk. Enormous regional differences can be seen in the availability of homes and assisted living accommodations for seniors, in-home care or hospices and palliative facilities. EHFG-President Leiner is calling for European adjustment funds to help assure an aging process in dignity, irrespective of one's area of residence. EHFG board member Pirich advocates blanket palliative care throughout Europe.

Bad Hofgastein, October 7, 2010 – “We need a European fund for the aged. Everyone should be able to age in dignity in Europe, not just in a few member countries,” Professor Günther Leiner said today. Dr. Leiner is president of the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG). Europe's aging societies were part of the agenda at today's EHFG.

About 600 decision-makers from the fields of health care policy, research, science, commerce and patient organizations from more than 40 countries are meeting in Bad Hofgastein Austria, at the EU's most important health care conference, to discuss vital future issues related to Europe's healthcare systems.

16 million seniors in Europe in danger of poverty

In Europe too, old age is increasingly becoming a poverty risk factor. According to European Union statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC), 20% of Europeans are endangered or about 16 million aged 65 or older. That's a significantly higher percentage than in the population on average. The results among the EU member states differ quite substantially. In Lithuania, seniors encounter the highest risk with some 51 percent affected.

For an old age in dignity, Dr. Leiner envisions an EU adjustment fund that would help compensate for the deficit in available care for older people. A model could be the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): the existing European financial assistance mechanism that aims to reduce economic development inequalities among the various regions of Europe. Such a measure would be fully within the spirit of the European Commission's Europe 2020 strategy, a leading initiative for “ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion by helping the poor and socially excluded.”

“Financing older people is severely endangered, especially during crisis periods and in the wake of the financial meltdown, a development that will further intensify. Increasingly we will be confronted with the problem of older people not able to live off their pensions and savings.” On top of that are vast differences among regions, and in many cases completely insufficient provisioning of dignified living arrangements for older people, whether nursing homes or in-home care services. Leiner comment: “I fear it is no coincidence when at the same time the debate about legalizing assisted-suicide persistently flares up.”

EU wide blanket coverage of palliative care demanded: the well-cared for don't want suicide help

Catch phrase: support at life's twilight. Despite all the progress in palliative medicine for seriously ill people, blanket care in Europe in things like special mobile hospice services and stationary palliative

accommodations is far from assured, as was pointed out by EHFG board member, Dr. Eberhard Pirich. “There are vast differences here from country to country, even within the EU.” The development of palliative support in Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries is considered exemplary.

Charter at European-level discussed

Dr. Pirich is calling for a broad debate on this theme at the European level. An important impetus for that can be the recently completed charter that aims to promote societal confrontation with the theme of death and terminal care. “The subject of death belongs to life. It should not be suppressed or ignored. On the contrary, its place is central to society,” says Pirich. “Despite all the medical progress and prospects for living longer and better, we should bear in mind that in Germany alone 800,000 people die annually - that’s one percent of the German population - and they are doing so under quite variable conditions. Neither in health nor in social policy, neither in educational expenditures nor in public communication is dying in dignity, are death and mourning explicitly or appropriately taken into account,” Dr. Pirich remarked.

“From EHFG’s point of view, we consider it important to facilitate a death under dignified conditions for the most seriously and terminally ill, and in particular to counter efforts toward legalization of killing on demand with an alternative perspective involving caring and human companionship, Dr. Pirich reflected.

www.charta-zur-betreuung-sterbender.de

Forum 1 „Healthy Ageing“: Hosted by the Ministry of Health, Taiwan: Wednesday, 6 October and Thursday, October 7, 2010

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