



EHFG 2011: “INNOVATION MUST BE PUT AT THE SERVICE OF THE PATIENT” – SAYS EU HEALTH COMMISSIONER JOHN DALLI

EU Health Commissioner John Dalli told the closing EHFG press conference "Europe needs to put innovation at the service of the patients and to innovate more on products and services. Europe needs innovation to deliver better and safer healthcare to more people in a more sustainable manner". Europe needs to promote the health professions to fill growing shortages in Europe. Mr Dalli underlined that national governments invest substantial sums in training health professionals and that poorer countries provide “reverse solidarity” when their health professionals move abroad. Commissioner Dalli stressed his commitment to strengthening EU Tobacco Products law and helping citizens stop smoking. He further expressed that the European Commission is monitoring closely the different national taxes on unhealthy foods.

Bad Hofgastein, October 7, 2011 – EU Health Commissioner Dalli told the concluding EHFG press conference that "we need to innovate more on products, on services, on how we manage healthcare. We also need innovative ways to invest in health to deliver more with less". Responding to several questions on healthcare workforce, Mr Dalli said “It costs a lot of money to train medical staff,” “Poor countries are subsidising the richer ones. It’s a kind of reverse solidarity.”

He revealed that the issue of healthcare shortages was discussed at length during the Hungarian Presidency of the EU last year. He further stressed that fostering active and healthy ageing is a key priority that the Commission is tackling head on from different angles - health, research and information society."

Emphasising the challenges posed by Europe’s ageing population, Mr Dalli pointed out that many elderly people were being looked after by carers that are elderly themselves. “Now you have 60-year-olds looking after their 80 or 85-year-old mothers or fathers. We need to re think our healthcare systems, to look after our old people.”

Europe’s annual 600,000 cancer deaths “devastating”

He also endorsed observations by EHFG President Günther Leiner that the attitude of some healthcare staff was lamentable, and in general that the medical professions had become excessively careerist. “You have to like people,” Prof Leiner said. Commissioner Dalli agreed that it was important for those going into the caring professions not to see it as simply a job: “No-one expects you to work for nothing, but you need the vocation– these are human beings you are caring for, towards whom you must feel responsibility. It is not just a job.”

In answer to questions about smoking – still prevalent in Austria – Mr Dalli was critical of tobacco companies’ strategies for making the habit more attractive, such as pretty packaging and flavouring –“peanut, pina-colada” and said he thought non-cigarette methods of delivering the nicotine “hit” such as electronic cigarettes should also be covered by a revised

Tobacco Directive. Mr Dalli, who was born in Malta, said it was “horrifying, devastating really” that every year 650,000 people in the EU died of tobacco related diseases. Commenting on Denmark’s decision to tax fatty food Dalli said the Commission was monitoring their effectiveness. The Commission was not seeking to coordinate such programmes.

The EHFG is the most important conference on health care policy in the EU. This year it attracted more than 600 decision-makers from 45 countries for discussions on the latest developments in health care policy.

EHFG Closing Press Conference, Plenum :Wellbeing and Priorities in Europe, 7 October 2011

EHFG Press Office:

Dr. Birgit Kofler

B&K Medien- und Kommunikationsberatung

Ph. during the Congress: +43 6432 3393 239

Mobile: +43 676 636 89 30

Ph. Vienna office: +43 1 319 43 78

e-mail: kofler@bkkommunikation.com