

“Quality and Safety in Health Care – EU Initiatives”

by

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**35th Panhellenic Congress
12-15 May 2008 - Vouliagmeni, Athens**

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to be back in Greece to address your Congress on the topic "Nursing: Safety and Quality in the working environment" from a European perspective. I'm grateful to the Hellenic Nursing Organisation for their commitment to the EFN work and would like to congratulate the new board members and the President, Eleni Kyritsi, for their recent election. This is the right moment for me to thank again Prof Vasilici Lanara and Prof Elisabeth Haralambidou for their hard work, commitment and achieved outcomes at National, European and International level.

But we all have challenges in front of us!

It goes without saying that the European Union initiatives on quality and safety will influence the national health agenda and as such the nursing agenda. Therefore, I will bring upfront these challenges related to quality and safety.

Let me start first with a statement:

"The National Governments, the European Commission and WHO will be very reactive and unable to fulfill their obligations under public health and patient safety, especially where the quality of care could be improved, if policy frameworks and strategies become out of touch with what the nursing profession is doing."

Therefore Governments should:

- Ensure an effective Stakeholder Approach at national and European level, involving nurses and nursing in all phases of policy-making. If policy implementation and involving and protecting patients and European citizens is the objective, civil society needs to be part of the national and European policy process. Leadership and good governance are key for success and a stakeholder approach leads to more realistic and effective policies, as well as improved implementation and outcomes. Therefore I strongly recommend the Hellenic Nurses Association to work closely with other health professionals, women, patient and consumer organisations in Greece to set pro-active the health and nursing agenda. Regulators, professional associations, employers and patient organisations, as well as a wider group of academic institutions, all have a role to play in the national and European policy process.
- Provide strategic support for a qualitative and equitable health service in Europe by means of developing a workforce of effective, competent and motivated nurses. Safety and quality depends on this motivated

and committed workforce as the mobility and shortage of nurses within the EU is a fact. EFN developed ethical guidelines for employing nurses – as well as keeping nurses in the workforce. Since the last five years EFN has been lobbying, with success, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the World Health Organisation of the European Region to put “Human Resources for Health” and “Brain Drain” high on the political agenda. And they did. DG Sanco is coming up in November 2008 with a green paper on Health Professionals mobility and DG Research approved three European project, to start beginning 2009, on the mobility and forecasting of the nursing workforce. The WHO is also moving on by putting health systems on the political agenda but still do not involve nurses in developing charters and recommendations. Therefore I urge the national nursing associations to get involved in the National delegations as experts in the WHO and Commission meetings.

- Investing in human capital by ensuring better education provision and steadily increasing qualification levels, particularly among nurses, is essential to achieve effective and efficient outcomes. EFN members need to keep on pushing the governments to implement the new Directive on Mutual recognition of Professional Qualifications (Directive 36) and implement the signed Bologna process agreement. It is important to underline that across Europe, not all nurses are educated to degree level at the point of initial registration and more ways to reach registered nurse status are possible. Therefore it is important to measure the impact of the Bologna Process on the workforce composition. Furthermore, we should make sure that the ICN competencies for the Generalist Nurse are promoted at European level, in order to facilitate mobility, high quality of care and patient safety. Without a doubt, the Bologna process will lead to setting standards, which will apply both to educational nursing institutes as well as to nurses and the services they provide. This in turn will automatically lead to a discussion on the individual roles and responsibilities of doctors and nurses. It is about skill mix, who is doing what. Therefore I urge EFN members to apply for structural and social cohesion funds for Continuing Professional Development for practising healthcare professionals to achieve high quality standards and patient outcomes in all health care settings. Within this context it is essential to cooperate with national patient organisations.

Finally, the EU health services legislation coming out of the Brussels policy process is essential for our future and we need to get it right from the beginning. This legislative proposal needs to build on the common values and principles, universal access and solidarity, agreed on by the Council of Ministers. It is important the legislation takes into account patient sensitive indicators, to gather information on quality of service and to put in place safeguards and mechanisms to address complaints. It is also necessary to develop clear lines of accountability for the continuity of patient care, and a

clear system of information exchange, to assist patients to make informed choices about their healthcare.

But next to the hard core legislation, which is part of the co-decision process at European level, EFN favours making progress on the "soft law initiatives". Networking on patient safety, addressing health care associated infections, reducing sharp injuries and medication errors are more practical initiatives at European level to which EFN members are committed. The EFN members information and data on specific topics to develop these "soft law initiatives" is key for success. The commission appreciates EFN input to the policy process as this information and data reflect what is happening in the field. Therefore EFN signed up to the EUNetPaS project on patient safety in which the Greek Government leads on the education Work Package 2. I'm convinced we will get brilliant outcomes.

In conclusion, I believe that despite the many challenges the nursing profession is facing in the near future, we all need to be very optimistic. Nurses are the promoters and vehicle for change. Nurses want to see results so recommendations and guidelines are not only ending up on book shelves. Nurses provide leadership for change and therefore need to strengthening their voice. "One voice for nurses and nursing" is the key for successful outcomes in policy and practice. National and European policy influence needs a strong, united voice in nursing.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Paul De Raeve
May 2008