EU health stakeholders call for strong political commitment on patient safety

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Event Coverage

Bad Hofgastein, Austria: Digital solutions and better surveillance systems key to safer care, conference told.

Andrea Ammon | *Photo credit: European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG)*

Delegates at this year's European Health Forum Gastein have been told that better data collection and surveillance is needed to ensure patient safety and to tackle the estimated 8.8 million cases of healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) across the EU.

Such action, the forum heard on Wednesday, will also help combat the threat posed by Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

The demand comes some ten years after the adoption of EU recommendations on patient safety.

The session, at the annual health policy get-together in Austria, focused on patient safety in Europe and how national and European policymakers can shape effective strategies to tackle the issue.

The "data for safer care" session explored the potential of surveillance networks and monitoring, the development of a 'safety culture' and blame-free approach to patient safety reporting and the EU's role in sharing relevant data on patient safety.

> *"The next challenge is to implement standardised electronic surveillance of Antimicrobial Resistance and healthcare-associated infections in more than 8,000 European acute care hospitals. The ECDC is ready to help make this happen"* **Andrea Ammon, the director at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)**

Andrea Ammon, the director at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), said it was necessary to improve timely detection of emerging threats of antimicrobial resistant pathogens and to reduce the workload of surveillance.

"The next challenge is to implement standardised electronic surveillance of AMR and HAIs in more than 8,000 European acute care hospitals", said Ammon, adding, "The ECDC is ready to help make this happen."

Paul Garassus, president of the European Union of Private Hospitals said, "big changes" are ongoing for "smart hospitals" in the EU offering a "global service" and connecting professionals in a collaborative network.

"The objective", he explained, "is to improve efficiency and to assure quality of outcomes for patients."

Fiona Garin McDonagh, a senior director at Becton, Dickinson and Company, told the packed audience that patient experience is "at the heart" of what healthcare aspires to be.

Healthcare acquired infections negatively disrupt this experience, she said, explaining, "Strong leadership, a strong patient safety culture and safe, innovative and optimised technology can go a long way in preventing a large percentage of them."

Further comment came from Fernando Simon, director at the Centro Coordinador de Alertas y

Emergencias Sanitarias with the Spanish health ministry.

> *"Strong leadership, a strong patient safety culture and safe, innovative and optimised technology can go a long way in preventing [Healthcare acquired infections]"* **Fiona Garin McDonagh, a senior director at Becton, Dickinson and Company**

He believes there is an "unavoidable" link between patient safety and surveillance, adding that there is a need for "identifying efficient and effective activities for the control of healthcare associated infections.

Another speaker, Sinikka Salo, of the Finnish ministry of social affairs and health, told the session that ICT, big data and new technologies like AI "give excellent ways to improve patient safety."

She said, "The EU could promote the creation of common reporting standards and common platforms for the collection and sharing of information."

Neda Milevska, of the International Alliance of Patients' Organizations noted that healthcare should be safe therefore healthcare-associated infections "stand in the way" of this.

"With political commitment, a large share of them can be prevented with simple and effective measures."

Federico Lega, president of the European Health Management Association argued that making care safe "must be a strategic, operational and ethical priority.

For this, a "safety culture" is of paramount importance, he said, adding, "such culture is the result of a new posture led by top managers of health organisations and diffused in all organisational ranks."

> *"Healthcare-associated infections are the most common adverse events in health care settings. We need a joint vision and joint effort, coming from all the health care stakeholders to push for a strong political commitment for safer care"* **Health First Europe director Melina Raso**

Further intervention came from Germán Peñalva, of the EU-JAMRAI Joint Action and Institute of Biomedicine of Seville who believes "timely, regular" monitoring of indicators related to healthcare-linked infections is a "key factor" to "design, implement and improve" prevention and control.

"This monitoring requires professional leadership and institutional support."

Rounding up a lively, two-hour debate Health First Europe director Melina Raso said, "HAIs are the most common adverse events in health care settings. We need a joint vision and joint effort, coming from all the health care stakeholders to push for a strong political commitment for safer care."

She added there was a need to "move gradually from disease surveillance systems based on notifications by healthcare professionals to systems that make direct use of healthcare data.

This change will require a profound understanding of data-driven innovation for safer care and the involvement of the political, commercial, public health and societal actors."

The European Health Forum Gastein is an independent, non-partisan organisation, founded in 1998

which aims is to provide a platform for discussion on health policy in the EU and beyond.

Over 500 leading health experts and stakeholder are participating in the annual policy-focussed conference held in the Gastein Valley in the Austrian Alps. The three-day event concludes on Friday.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine.

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