



# The Newsletter of European Medical Specialists

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## Summary

The European Commission has launched infringement proceedings against Spain and the UK with regard to the reimbursement of urgent hospital care.

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The European Medicines Agency has established a new database on European drugs.

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A recent EU survey has confirmed that EU citizens are generally aware of the need to undergo medical screenings but also noted the lack of provision of regular check-ups.

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## EU legislation on electromagnetic fields put on hold to protect MRI

*On 26<sup>th</sup> October last, following concerns voiced by the “Alliance for MRI” (which brings together the medical profession (UEMS) and patient, industry and scientific organizations with the support of MEPs), the European Commission has proposed to postpone for four years - until 30 April 2012 - the deadline for introducing legislation on workers’ exposure to electromagnetic fields, which would have limited the use of technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) for patients. According to the*

*Commission, this should allow enough time to prepare amendments to the Directive in order to take account of recent research findings on the possible impact of the exposure limits for MRI. (See also UEMS News 2006/02)*

### Postponement for amendment

The Commission indicates in its proposal that this postponement is being carried out in order to prepare a substantive amendment to the Directive in order to en-

The Commission recognises MRI as a technology offering clear benefits to patients, and continues to support MRI research financially



V. Špidla

EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs

sure that limits will not have an adverse effect on the practice of MRI, whilst ensuring appropriate protection of personnel. Moreover, it is intended to review the situation for all sectors where personnel are exposed to electromagnetic fields while carrying out their work.

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## SANCO Future Challenges Paper for 2009-2014

*On 21<sup>st</sup> September 2007, DG SANCO published its “Future Challenges paper: 2009-2014” which aims to provide a “draft vision” of the main challenges that this Directorate-General will be facing under the lifespan of the next Commission.*

This publication was built

on the views of many SANCO officials together with the input of a number of external experts and addresses questions such as: “How will the environment in which we operate evolve in the coming 10-20 years? Should we aim for best equity-led policies or

mainstream health in each policy area?” The drafting process resorted to different scenarios developed in workshops conceived to reflect on the core issues at stake: **governance, globalisation, changing**

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## Internal Market - Infringement proceedings

### Spain & UK - Urgent hospital treatment

*The Commission has decided to send a reasoned opinion to the United Kingdom and Spain due to the refusal of the authorities of those Member States to allow an additional reimbursement for costs incurred as a result of urgent hospital treatment received in another Member State.* In *Vanbraeckel* (Case C-368/98), the Court ruled on the question of reimbursement of hospital treatment in the case of a patient authorised to undergo such treatment in another Member State (scheduled care). The Court considered that

according to the principle of freedom to provide services as enshrined in Article 49 of the Treaty, the reimbursement should have been at least identical to that which the patient would have been granted if hospitalised in their own Member State of affiliation. The Court pointed out that this could lead to payment of an additional reimbursement where the rate of reimbursement in the patient's Member State of affiliation was more advantageous than that of the Member State where the hospital treatment was given.

The Commission considers that this should apply equally well in a case where a tourist or anyone else temporarily resident in another Member State is in need of urgent hospital care. The Commission considers that European citizens' freedom, as recipients of services, to go to another Member State for treatment would be curtailed if they did not have the right to obtain such an additional reimbursement where they have to be hospitalised urgently in another Member State.

**European Commission's action to extend patient rights to reimbursement of urgent hospital care**

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**society and confidence.** The paper is now being widely circulated both at the Commission and externally. This consultation process will contribute to validate, improve and ultimately develop a common understanding of DG SANCO's vision, which will hopefully bring added value to the overall reflection on the future within the Commission.

### SANCO 2009-2014

*Feedback or comments can be sent to DG Sanco ([sanco-futures@ec.europa.eu](mailto:sanco-futures@ec.europa.eu)) by the end of December 2007.*

*For further information on the paper, please consult the following website: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_consumer/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/index_en.htm).*

### EUDRAPARM The European medicines database

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) recently launched a new public database which aims to facilitate access to information on medicines available within the EU.

This database, called "EUDRAPARM", will give online access to information about all medicines available to EU citizens through its web portal <http://www.eudrapharm.eu>.

## Eurobarometer on Health Prevention

### Too few check-ups despite awareness

*On 14<sup>th</sup> September, the Eurobarometer survey on 'Health in the European Union' revealed that European citizens seem to be aware, overall, of the importance of having preventive medical checkups, but certain tests are still infrequently performed, especially colorectal cancer screening (only 8% of Europeans responding).*

The survey which was released for the European Prostate Awareness Day, indicates that only 13% of European men took the Prostate Specific Antigen Test and only 8% of all respondents the colorectal test.

The survey showed Euro-

peans are aware of the importance of preventive check-ups, with more than six out of ten citizens carrying out dental tests and four out of ten taking eye-tests each year. A majority of EU citizens considers itself to be in good health, with only 7% assessing their health as poor or very poor.

However, there is still evidence of health inequalities, with twice as many of the least educated group (14%) saying they are in poor health condition.

Furthermore, the survey also examined the issue of women's health. Here, there are encouraging signs of a high take-

up rate for testing; for example, 43% of women underwent a manual breast examination.

In this group as well, health inequalities were present with testing being more frequent amongst the better educated and employed women.

About three in every ten Europeans (29%) have a long-standing illness or health problem. However the trend is not the same in all countries.

Further information:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_publication/eurobarometers\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_publication/eurobarometers_en.htm)

*It is necessary to improve awareness about prostate and colorectal cancer. Men should consult their doctors about regular screenings. The check-up data for these two types of cancer are alarming.*



*M. Kyprianou  
EU Commissioner  
for Health*

## Publications & Events

### PUBLICATIONS

#### **Harm reduction in nicotine addiction – Helping people who can't quit**

*A report by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians October 2007*

The report should be read by health professionals in all areas but particularly medicine and public health, and by politicians, civil servants and tobacco control advocates.

#### **The Effectiveness of Health Impact Assessment: Scope and limitations of supporting decision-making in Europe**

*The European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies October 2007*

### EVENTS

#### **ISWC Workshop on Semantic Web on Ubiquitous Healthcare**

*12 November 2007*

*Busan, South Korea*

This Workshop takes place as part of the 6th International Semantic Web Conference (11-15 November 2007).

#### **Conference on the role of the internet in medicine**

*25-26 January 2008*

*Vienna, Austria*

The University of Vienna will hold the final conference of the project "Virtually Informed: The Internet in the medical field".

*For any further information on any of these events and/or publications, please contact the UEMS Secretariat.*



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**Mark your diary!**

As already announced, the UEMS will celebrate its 50th Anniversary in April 2008. The programme was already defined as follows:

- 17- S&B Pres&Sec Meeting
- 18- Conference & Gala
- 19- Council Meeting

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**Background for action**

The EU Directive on physical agents (2004/40/EC), which was adopted by Parliament and Council in April 2004 and due to enter into force in April 2008, officially aimed to protect workers from occupational exposure to electromagnetic fields. In 2006, concerns were raised by representatives of the medical and scientific communities that these provisions, if implemented, would prevent healthcare staff from assisting or caring for patients during MRI imaging. This would have then led to denying such imaging to these patients or require the use of alternative procedures, such as X-rays whose detrimental effects are well-known. At the same time, Scientists expressed concerns that this Directive would have threatened Europe's position as a world leader in MRI research. Common action was undertaken and coordinated through the "Alliance for MRI". This Alliance, representing a coalition of patient groups, European scientists, medical professionals (through the UEMS) and MEPs, campaigned to raise decision-makers' awareness with regard to this issue.

On various occasions, and notably at a lunch debate held in the European Parliament in June 2007, Vladi-



mír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, committed himself to examine the possibilities of revising this piece of legislation in the light of evidence presented by the medical and scientific communities.

**Follow-up**

Consultation and contacts are still ongoing with the European Commission and Parliament to ensure that this political achievement is followed by an effective derogation for MRI from the scope of the Directive. Partner organizations within the "Alliance for MRI" share the view that advances in medical technology should not be threatened by burdensome legal

## Electromagnetic fields & MRI

If the EC legislation were implemented, it would almost certainly impact on patient welfare and be a major setback for scientific research, denying patients innovative treatments in the future.



G.Krestin  
University Medical Centre Rotterdam

provisions "when concerns can be addressed through responsible guidance to medical and service personell". MRI workers are indeed already protected by the provisions of the EU Directive on medical devices (93/42/EEC) and the MR safety standard IEC/EN 60601-2-33.

**The UEMS reaction**

The UEMS has been involved in this political action since its very beginning and welcomes this new development as the outcome of the efficient collaboration between the medical profession, the scientific society together with patient and industry organizations. At the same time, the UEMS calls on every stakeholder involved in this issue to continue to raise awareness on the importance of this matter. Further developments will of course be dealt with in future issues of this Newsletter.

*For further information, please contact the UEMS Secretariat.*

***If you have any views with regard to the issues covered in this Newsletter, do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat of UEMS.***