

An agenda for robust healthcare

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Last update: 4 January 2018



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We often say that in healthcare policy there is no one-size-fits-all solution. But despite the many differences in how countries define, organise and deliver health services and medical care, a number of common challenges can be tackled together. Most national health systems face unprecedented pressures to evolve, be it because of demographics, technological developments, changing epidemiology or patient engagement, and they often struggle to deliver tailored, patient-centred care, while keeping their spending in check.

The growing demand for healthcare in an economic climate that calls for cost-containment has led the European Commission to propose an agenda with actions to help EU countries make their national health systems more effective, accessible and resilient. This agenda makes a particularly strong case for better integrated person-centred care, and greater use of primary care, as well as the development of innovative technology-based solutions. These policies will not

only help patients with several concurrent diseases live independently with a better quality of life, they will also save precious healthcare resources.

To help translate these ideas into reality, the Commission has set up an expert group on health systems performance assessment (HSPA), with the task of identifying practical, sound policy tools and actions. Its first report in April 2016 recommends more consideration of patient experiences and outcomes, and it is currently working on how to set up and measure successful integrated care systems, built around the concept of patient-centred care respectful of individual patients' specific needs, expectations and values.

Among other key EU initiatives with the core aim of improving patient access to effective and sustainable health systems, let me highlight European Reference Networks, an innovative cross-border approach to help cost-effectively use European expertise to diagnose and treat rare and complex diseases; and the work towards strengthening EU co-operation on Health Technology Assessment to efficiently measure the added value of new health technologies.

The EU is not alone in its aspiration to provide tailored, patient-centred care. No system or organisation can succeed alone, and there are great benefits to learning from one another. I am therefore optimistic that our collaboration with the OECD and other international organisations will bring about better and faster solutions for all.

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