



“The economic crisis: Impact and the way forward”

By Ioannis Leontiou

EFN Vice-President

Triad Meeting, 14th May 2010

Ramada Park Hotel, Geneva, Switzerland

1. Dear Honorable Guests,

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the President and the Executive Committee of the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN), I would like to thank the ICN for giving us the opportunity to speak on the topic: “The economic crisis: Impact and the way forward”.

With this opportunity, I would also like to congratulate the organizers of this meeting and of course for their strong commitment on continuous leadership in Nursing and Midwifery worldwide and the close cooperation with the EFN.

2. The EFN was established in 1971. It represents over 32 National Nurses Associations and its work has an effect on the daily work of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe.

3. Having in mind the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, we believe that in order to bring about better results, it is important to have Nurses and Midwives Associations working towards shaping the European Union policies for achieving the best possible outcomes utilizing a stakeholder approach.

A lot of initiatives have been started by European and International Organizations in order to raise awareness about managing diversity and – especially for this meeting - advance the health status of populations through nursing and midwifery contribution.

4. Focusing on the overall concept of the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary General has recently stated that these are *an expression of basic human rights: the rights of everyone to good health, education and shelter*¹.

5. In regard to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; the Secretary General’s Report; among others; suggests:

¹ *Keeping the promise: a forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015* - Report of the Secretary-General
United Nations A/64/665: General Assembly Sixty-fourth session: Agenda items 48 and 114
Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the

- Examine all Millennium Development Goals through a gender lens,
- Interventions that have the greatest impact on health
- Strengthening of the national health systems.
- Need for a scale up of global financing

The global economic crisis is of high priority for European National Nursing Organisations and has been under the scope of our discussions during previous General Assembly meetings.

6. The work of an EFN General Assembly in April 2009 led to a Press Release noting that the majority of the European Union countries reported health budget cuts, staff lay-offs, closure of units, hospitals and other healthcare facilities, reduced salaries, reduced intake of nursing students, forced unpaid leave and reduced pension schemes.

7. Furthermore, European National Nursing Organisations reported (April 2009) that the health budgets in many countries have been reduced by an average of 6% (e.g. Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania) consequently leading to loss of Nursing posts and suspension of recruitment efforts (e.g. *Cyprus*, Italy, Slovenia, Sweden).

Simultaneously, we are witnessing a substantial increase in the Nursing workload due to an increase in social deprivation as well as because of reduced staffing levels (e.g. Croatia, Czech Republic, France, and Spain).

8. The above report concludes that: *“The efforts towards developing a high quality and sustainable health workforce able to deliver the highest standards of safety and quality in healthcare must not be sacrificed for short term gains..”*

9. EFN MEMBERS' PRIORITIES (April 2009)

At the same time; European Nursing Organisations provided a summary of their key priorities in an attempt to gain a much wider perspective on the collective issues of concern for Nursing and Health in the EU. The Big Five priority areas for EFN members include: 10

1. Nurse education

This area includes issues such as harmonization with European Directive 2005/36EC and Bologna declaration (process); advancing Nursing into higher education with post-graduate specialties, Masters, and Doctoral programmes; and provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

2. Workforce planning, working conditions, and pay

There are concerns about the impending shortage of nurses and inherent difficulties in recruitment and retention. Working conditions can often be difficult for Nurses and therefore significant improvement is needed

especially in making the profession more attractive. The most sensitive priority area concerns issues of nurse pay.

3. *Policy making and regulation*

Nursing Associations are working towards greater involvement within their National politics aiming on advocacy for, patient, nursing and health issues into the policy arena. To this end, Nursing Research is decisively important in informing National Health Policies. A number of regulatory challenges exist since there is an atmosphere of regulating different aspects of the profession.

4. *Patient safety and quality of care*

In response to the ever changing nature of the health services environment, the EFN Members consider issues of skill mix, skill needs, new role development, and specialist practice vital in promoting and maintaining Quality Care and Patient Safety.

5. *Entrepreneurship*

Gradually Nursing is embracing issues of entrepreneurship and the EFN Members are in process of supporting entrepreneurs adjust and enter a complex environment. Significant progress may be seen in the Nurse Prescribing movement.

11. EFN proposals

As the EFN called on making the application for Social Cohesion Funds more transparent and easy, the European Parliament endorsed a report strengthening our concerns. Having the economic crisis in mind, the application of Social Cohesion Funds in a coordinated way should be a support for all EFN members.

“What is good for nurses is good for patients!”

12. WORKFORCE

EFN participated in the consultation process on the Green Paper for EU Workforce for Health designating through a Position statement and a letter to the Commissioner for Health that the Green Paper should provide the framework for the development of a high-quality health workforce of sufficient capacity and with the right skills to face future healthcare challenges by: 13.

- Putting in place an EU monitoring and planning system to support decision-making
- Investing in Human Capital by covering recruitment and retention strategies,
- Putting in place an EU Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Framework and,
- Taking a gender approach to workforce planning and valuing the increased participation of women.

14. HEALTH SYSTEMS – HEALTH SERVICES

The EFN emphasizes that the objective of any EU health services activity must be to promote and ensure *high quality patient care* based on the common values and principles in the EU health systems: solidarity, accessibility and sustainability².

15. Regarding the EU Directive on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare; and in relation to the financial ability of patients to pay for treatment; the EFN³ stressed the possibility of increasing inequalities since patients coming from the lower cost Member States are exposed to top-up payments given that the home Member State is only required to reimburse the cost of the home country.

16. QUALITY AND SAFETY STANDARDS

In response to the Directorate General for Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) initiatives on quality and safety standards, we would argue for⁴:

1. Setting up a European Network of Quality and Safety Standards to develop clear and transparent principles and criteria for EU Quality and Safety Standards as well as good practices in Quality of Care and Patient Safety.

“Doing the right things, to the right citizens, in the right way, at the right time, using the right resources, in the right place every time and delivering the right services even better the next time, equals quality and safety”.

17. PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

In fact, the European Commission has never put Primary Health Care on its political agenda, or in working programmes. Nevertheless, in December 2008 the EFN provided input to the consultation process of the Green Paper on Workforce for Health (As mentioned earlier) in which we emphasized that: *“the increasing focus on Primary Health Care will be of huge benefit to citizens’ health and national budgets. Therefore, the artificial distinction between health and social care should be removed and combined into a single integrated care system linking both policies together.”*

Epilogue

Dear colleagues,

18. Traditions and special circumstances in the Health Sector exist in all countries. Governments must find solutions that will function in relation to these special conditions.

² EFN POSITION PAPER ON THE FUTURE EU HEALTH SERVICES: September 2007

³ EFN Position Statement on Patients rights in cross border Healthcare – October 2008

⁴ EFN General Assembly, 16-17 April 2009, Brussels, EFN Policy Dialog on Quality and Safety Standards

National Nurses and Midwives Associations must be further involved at the national level to raise the quality of inter-sectoral dialogue and debate aiming at improvement of the health status of the society.

There are countless examples emerging from the diversity of our experiences, which can be used to inspire one another, to learn from each other, and jointly, to make stronger links to empower the co-operation between authorities and social partners internationally.

19. We must strengthen dialogue so any challenges will be faced leading to better, healthcare for everyone. We must work against social exclusion and create equal opportunities for all citizens.

I strongly believe that raising issues of employment and working conditions will give a tremendous boost to the implementation of new practices, in favor of citizens. Finally, Information Technology can be used as a mean of increasing opportunities for consumers to have better access to health services.

20. Thank you.