

EU supports transplantology

Challenges for the years ahead

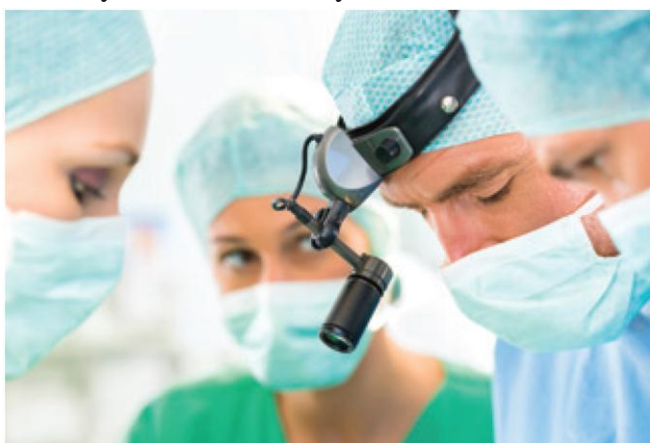
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The European Union is facing multiple challenges in 2014-2020: an ageing population, including doctors and nurses reaching retirement age, the emigration of medical staff in search of better jobs and pay, the need to reform the system for training specialists, and lastly the need to ensure innovation in medicine. These challenges – particularly in our country – still require investment, including in the social dimension of the issue of organ donation and transplantation.

Educating a new generation of doctors

One of the main problems is the insufficient number of specialist doctors in European hospitals. This affects Poland too, especially since we joined the EU in 2004. **Andrzej Rýs**, a Director in the Directorate-General for Health and Consumers, considers that, at present, the Polish statistics give no cause for alarm. According to the data of the Polish Chamber of Physicians, the number of doctors expressing a desire to work abroad is minimal compared with the mass emigration during the period 2004-2006. An issue which is currently creating headaches for EU health experts is the training of healthcare specialists and the reform of the system introduced at the beginning of this century. That system needs to be improved, above all as regards the training of young doctors, the acquisition of specialist qualifications and the role of the family doctor. There is a need for coordination between all these areas. Unfortunately, more than ten years after the introduction of this system, reforms that are even more radical are required – discussions on this very subject are already ongoing within the EU. Inevitable demographic processes linked to an ageing population, including healthcare specialists, present a challenge to the European Union for the years ahead.

Andrzej Rýs affirms that the groundwork is being laid for training a new generation of doctors and nurses, but it is up to the Polish Government and the Ministry of Health to decide how much importance they attach to the further training of specialists and supporting young doctors and medical auxiliary staff. Fortunately, directors of medical establishments may to a large extent invest (using



EU funds) independently in staff. However, the problem of training affects not only individual establishments but also the healthcare system as a whole. According to Director A. Rýs, the EU recognises the importance of doctors and nurses. – *At EU level we have singled out three professional categories requiring specialised development strategies, one of which is the category of healthcare professionals.*

Horizon 2020 – higher quality research

In the new financial perspective 2014 – 2020, innovative healthcare projects will receive support under the new Horizon 2020 programme. These include any measures concerning organ transplantation, for instance, as this is an innovative field of medicine and is justified on both

economic and social grounds. Transplantation is at the forefront of innovation, requiring new technologies spanning both biotechnology and medical engineering, which is why the EU attaches great importance to supporting this branch of medicine. As in the case of work on artificial hearts, new technological solutions are being identified in the area of ICT and distance surgery.

The importance of cooperation

Local authorities play an important role in supporting healthcare measures in the area of organ donation and transplantation, amongst others. Given that each of us is or will be a patient and may be a potential organ donor or recipient, great store should be set by active cooperation between local communities and medical establishments. With this in mind, both medical establishments and local authorities or NGOs can and should get on board as soon as possible. Even though the body responsible for hospitals is the Ministry of Health – cooperation with local authorities is also useful, as the desired outcomes – high quality medical services for patients, who are after all also members of the local community – will be achieved more quickly through cooperation.

Tonio Borg, European Commissioner for Health and Consumers, is very active in promoting organ donation and transplantation – *Every day in the EU ten patients die after waiting in vain for a transplant and the chance of a new life. Around 64 000 people in the EU are hoping to receive a suitable organ. These are alarming figures and we must do everything possible to reduce them.*

Promoting good practice

Attending in person a meeting on good practice in organ donation and transplantation, cooperation between doctors and local authorities along with representatives of non-governmental organisations, Commissioner Tonio Borg listens with great attention and undisguised emotion to the experiences of those who have gained a new better quality life as a result of receiving a transplant. – *I am deeply moved by the stories of those who donated their own organs – or those of deceased close relatives – to those in need, but also the stories of those who are enjoying a new lease of life – explains the Commissioner. – We should talk about this and do as much as possible to make individual EU countries and regions aware of the vital importance of cooperating with one another. So much can be achieved for the good of local communities by engaging in bilateral cooperation agreements to exchange information on the availability of organs for transplantation. On that basis, having truly convinced ourselves of the role and importance of transplantation in our European reality, we can together achieve more – he argues.*



In the new financial perspective, particularly under Horizon 2020 – the successor programme to the EU's seventh framework programme – steady and effective cooperation between partners, including in medical fields, will be positively perceived, but should also involve local authorities and non-governmental organisations. This type of all-embracing cooperation has a chance of producing tangible results at many levels, not only in the area of research, but perhaps above all in terms of the practical applications of such research and the social impact of the new solutions, which is exactly what is happening in the case of organ transplantation and donation.

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