

Patient Safety and Quality of Care in the EU

Opinion adopted by the Expert Panel on Effective Ways of Investing in Health

Although it seems a given that all EU citizens should have access to the same standard of safe, quality health care, it is sadly not always the case. In fact, roughly one in ten patients admitted to hospital in the EU suffers from adverse events during the course of their care. Some 25% of these cases are due to hospital-acquired infections, while others are due to human error, medical device failures and other factors. Much patient harm is preventable, but strategies to reduce harm are not implemented consistently across the EU.

Discrepancies in health care have come even more under scrutiny since the cross-border healthcare directive, which went into effect in 2011, allows patients from one EU country to seek treatment or care in another.

Member States, in liaison with the Commission, coordinate their own policies and programmes concerning health protection, public health, physical and mental health, chronic diseases, health information and education and other related fields. The 2009 Council Recommendation on patient safety¹ adopted an all-encompassing approach to patient safety at EU-level but this overarching strategy doesn't exist for quality of care.

An implementation report on patient safety was published in November 2012, and based on it, a reflection process began on what should be done next at EU level in the field of patient safety and quality of care. To this end, the European Commission asked the independent Expert Panel on Effective ways of Investing in Health (EXPH) to provide an Opinion on the development of quality of health care, with a special emphasis on patient safety, in the EU.

The Expert Panel fulfilled its mandate and identified core dimensions of quality applicable to a broad spectrum of services including emergency services and long-term care.

1. COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 9 June 2009 on patient safety, including the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections



Based on scientific evidence and on past EU projects on quality and safety, the Expert Panel is of the opinion that services should be:

1. **Effective and improve health outcomes**
2. **Safe and prevent avoidable harm related to care**
3. **Appropriate and compliant with current professional knowledge as well as meeting agreed standards**
4. **Patient-centred, and involve patients/people as key partners in the process of care**
5. **Efficient, leading to the best value for the money spent, and equitable for all, in relation to need, utilization and quality**

A subset of indicators was also identified to measure and quantify the “amount” of health care quality and patients’ safety, which will be crucial for measuring, evaluating and comparing the quality and safety of EU health care systems.

The Expert Panel acknowledged that the EU Commission could play a crucial role in boosting the quality of health care and the safety of patients and came up with a list of actions that could be taken at EU level, including:

1. Setting up a “EU Health Care Quality Board” to coordinate all EU initiatives in health care quality
2. Setting up an EU-level “Health System Performance Analysis Framework” to make it easier to compare health policies and their impact
3. Initiating a process for drafting recommendations on health care quality
4. Funding more research into making health systems more resilient in order to promptly respond to any upcoming challenges
5. Setting up a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) network so EU countries can share knowledge about health technologies, health care processes and health system impact assessment and avoid duplicating efforts
6. Encouraging blame-free reporting concerning information technology and systems and developing EU surveillance systems
7. Building a Europe-wide health education programme from a patient-centred approach including health literacy, patient safety and health care



To see the full "Future EU Agenda on Patient Safety and Quality of Care" Opinion
http://ec.europa.eu/health/expert_panel/opinions/docs/006_safety_quality_of_care_en.pdf

For more on the Commission's work in the area of Patient Safety, see
http://ec.europa.eu/health/patient_safety/policy/index_en.htm