

The Key Role of HCPs for a Healthier Europe at the Core of the XVIII Edition of the European Patients' Rights Day

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Abstract:

Civil organization and patients' advocacy group (PAGs), together with healthcare professional associations call on European policy-makers to address the health workforce crisis by implementing solutions that prioritize the well-being of health workers, probably the main precondition for better protection of patients' rights across Europe. This message, also framed in a pre-electoral context, emerged during the celebration of the XVIII European Patients' Rights Day, which was, as always, organized at the EU Parliament in Brussels by Active Citizenship Network, the EU branch of the Italian NGO Cittadinanzattiva. In Europe, 15 million people work in health occupations, representing over 7% of the EU workforce and almost 4% of the EU population.

Key words: HCPs; healthier; Europe; practice; patients' advocacy group (PAGs); European elections; Public Health; European Union; Patients' Rights; skills shortage, medical desertification; job strain; health workforce

Summary:

Civil organization and patients' advocacy group (PAGs), together with healthcare professional associations call on European policy-makers to address the health workforce crisis by implementing solutions that prioritize the well-being of health workers, probably the main precondition for better protection of patients' rights across Europe. This message, also framed in a pre-electoral context, emerged during the celebration of the XVIII European Patients' Rights Day [1], which was, as always, organized at the EU Parliament in Brussels by Active Citizenship Network [2], the EU branch of the Italian NGO Cittadinanzattiva [3]. In Europe, 15 million people work in health occupations, representing over 7% of the EU workforce and almost 4% of the EU population [4]. The role of healthcare professionals (HCPs) is undeniably pivotal. However, their significance seems to be inadequately emphasized in the political sphere: whether in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), the conclusions of the Conference for the Future of Europe, or pre-election debates. Remarkably, considering also what was experienced during this mandate, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen did not even mention health or its professionals in her 2023 State of the Union speech [5], despite their foundational roles. As part of the European Year of Skills [6], the Commission's Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) report 2023 [7] puts a special focus on the analysis of labour shortages and skills gaps also in the health sector [8]. Projects funded under the EU4Health Work Programme (among others, the Joint Action "HEROES" [9] and the EU-funded project "AHEAD"

[10]) have addressed the persistent labour shortage in the health sector, while a widespread civic survey on health workers-conducted in Italy by Cittadinanzattiva investigated how 10.000 workers belonging to 20 health professions experience their condition, outlining the contours of what is a real "health workforce emergency" [11]. Neglecting the health workforce crisis jeopardizes current and future preventive and care options for citizens. Doctors, nurses and all the health workforce are essential within healthcare systems, ensuring the well-being of citizens and fostering trust in the system. Their support is paramount. Ahead of the European elections, which steps should we prioritize to address this pressing concern? What actions must be urgently taken? While trust isn't in doubt, there's a pronounced call for investments in training, support, proximity, new communication tools, and more. These calls come from European citizens, patients, and all stakeholders, including health professionals and those who invest in innovation. This issue - addressed from a public policy perspective - has been focused of the 18th edition of the European Patients' Rights Day [12] titled "The key role of HCPs for a healthier Europe. Combining the protection of patients' rights with skills shortage, medical desertification and job strain", celebrated at the European Parliament in Brussels on 20 March 2024, kindly hosted by MEP Brando Benifei (S&D) [13] and organised with the support of the MEPs Interest Group "European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare"[14].

Realized in its traditional multi-stakeholder format, the European celebration of the European Patients' Rights Day (anticipated at the EU Parliament on March 20th instead of the official date of April 18th due to the European elections) brought together European Institutions (Member of the EU Parliament and representatives of the European Commission-DG Santé), health workers' representatives (from European Specialist Nurses Organisations-ESNO [15], from the European Society for Trauma and Emergency Surgery-ESTES [16], and from FNO TSRM & PSTRP, the Italian federation of medical radiology health technicians and technical, rehabilitation and prevention health professions) [17], leaders of civil society and PAGs, consortium of EU-funded projects addressing the health workforce crisis, journalists, representatives of the Academies of Medicine (FEAM) [18] and of the private sector (from the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations-EFPIA) [19], independent expert as Vytenis

Andriukaitis, former European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety. Speeches underscored the pivotal role of Healthcare Professionals (HCPs) in safeguarding patients' rights, sparking important conversations on shaping a healthier future for Europe. But whether the EU can be that force of positive change, whether it can really inject the right momentum and steer us to improve health care and the working life of HCPs remains to be seen. Europe is facing many crises and as it gears up for the next election cycle, politics not people will take centre stage. And so this ticking time bomb - as the WHO calls it- may not find its solution just yet [20]. The XVIII European Patients' Rights Day was made possible by the unconditional support of Johnson & Johnson, Boehringer Ingelheim, Viatris, and received the attention of three media partners: Health Europa, TrendSanità-Policy and Procurement in HealthCare, and the peer-reviewed journal "Archives of Medical Research and Health Sciences".



Figure 1. The save the date of the initiative organized at the EU Parliament on 20th March, 2024 Keywords: European elections; Public Health; European Union; Patients' Rights; skills shortage, medical desertification; job strain; health workforce.

References:

- Active Citizenship Network: "20 March 2024 | European Parliament, Brussels: Celebration of the XVIII European Patients' Rights Day".
- Active Citizenship Network (ACN) is one of the most widespread and flexible European networks. Established in 2001, it is coordinated by Cittadinanzattiva, the Italian non-profit organization founded in 1978, independent from any political affiliation, trade unions, private companies and public institutions.
- Cittadinanzattiva APS is an organization, founded in Italy in 1978, which promotes citizens' activism for the protection of rights, the care of common goods, the support for people in conditions of weakness in Italy and abroad.
- European Commission "Pact for Skills: new partnership to promote skills in the health sector":
- European Commission "2023 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen":
- European Union "European Year of Skills":
- European Commission "Commission report finds labour and skills shortages persist and looks at possible ways to tackle them".
- Eurobarometer "European Year of Skills - Skills shortages, recruitment and retention strategies in small and medium-sized enterprises":
- HEROES Joint Action (HEalth woRkforce to meet health challengeS):
- EU funded project "Action for Health and Equity: Addressing medical Deserts" (AHEAD):
- The survey was conducted in Italy by Cittadinanzattiva in collaboration with the FNOPI, FNO TSRM, and PSTRP Federations. The study offers insights into the professional conditions of 10,000 workers representing 20 different health professions. Cittadinanzattiva "Health Urgency: Cittadinanzattiva presents the Civic Health Report 2023".
- To know the programme: www.activecitizenship.net/insights/1194-xviii-european-patientsrights-day-programme.html
- Brando Benifei, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.
- MEPs Interest Group "European Patients' Rights and Cross-border Healthcare":
- European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO), the voice of specialist nurses in Europe.
- European Society for Trauma and Emergency Surgery (ESTES).
- National federation of medical radiology health technicians and technical, rehabilitation and prevention health professions (FNO TSRM & PSTRP).
- Federation of European Academies of Medicine.

19. The European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) represents the biopharmaceutical industry operating in Europe.
20. <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7176584476863430657/>

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