

Brussels, 15 December 2008

## Commission takes steps to promote patient safety in Europe

***Each year, in the EU, between 8% and 12% of patients admitted to hospitals suffer harm from the healthcare they receive, including from healthcare associated infections. Much of that harm is preventable. Today, the Commission adopts a Communication and proposal for a Council Recommendation with specific actions that Member States can take, either individually, collectively or with the Commission, to improve the safety of patients.***

The Commissioner for Health, Androulla Vassiliou, said: "Patient safety is the cornerstone of good quality healthcare. I would like to see a Europe for patients where safety is paramount and citizens are confident and knowledgeable about the care they receive."

The most common types of adverse events in healthcare are: healthcare associated infections; incorrect or delayed diagnoses; surgical errors; and medication related errors. Most efforts to improve patient safety at Member State and EU levels have so far focussed on specific causes, for example, minimising the risk from medicinal products, medical devices or antimicrobial resistance. However, most adverse events are caused by a combination of factors which together result in harm to the patients

The Commission Communication recommends a comprehensive approach to improving patient safety. Member States are encouraged to put in place and improve strategies to prevent and control adverse events in all healthcare settings. The primary focus is on addressing systemic and organisational failures responsible for most harm to patients. Key recommendations for Member States include, for example: establishing or strengthening reporting and learning systems; embedding patient safety in the education and training of healthcare workers; involving patients in the development of safety measures; and providing patients with relevant information on health risks and safety issues. Member States are also encouraged to share best practice and expertise in this field. The Commission will work with Member States to develop common definitions and indicators for patient safety.

## **Healthcare associated infections**

The annual number of patients in the EU with at least one hospital acquired infection is estimated at 4.1 million patients, equivalent to one in twenty hospitalised patients<sup>1</sup>. Well known examples of such infections are those caused by the bacterium MRSA (meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). However, recent studies have shown that healthcare associated infections can be reduced by up to a third when certain infection prevention and control measures and structures are put in place. Therefore, the proposal includes a particular focus on healthcare associated infections. Key recommendations for Member States include: putting in place specific measures to prevent and control infections; ensuring that infection prevention and control is enhanced in hospitals; and having effective systems in place to detect and report infections.

## **Background**

The Commission held a public consultation on patient safety earlier this year, the results of which have informed today's proposal. This follows an earlier consultation on the specific threat to patient safety posed by healthcare associated infections. Working groups representing Member States and key stakeholder groups, including health professionals and patients, have also contributed to discussions informing both the general patient safety aspects and those on healthcare associated infections.

## **For further information please see:**

European Commission Website on Patient Safety, with link to the Communication Recommendation and a short film clip:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_systems/patient\\_safety\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_systems/patient_safety_en.htm)

Information on healthcare associated infections:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_threats/com/hcai\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/com/hcai_en.htm)

The ECDC Annual Epidemiological Report, 2008:

[http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Publications/AER\\_report.aspx](http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/Publications/AER_report.aspx)

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<sup>1</sup> ECDC Annual Epidemiological Report, 2008