



Commissioner Kyprianou
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
B – 1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, February 2006

Concern: contribution to the DG Health and Consumer Protection consultation on strategies for improving safety by prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections

Dear Commissioner,

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) welcomes this important initiative from the European Commission.

Healthcare associated infections are a very serious and highly complex issue, requiring a co-ordinated response involving all stakeholders. Europe's nurses are committed to helping tackle this problem in the most effective way possible. In this regard, we believe that the European Commission can play a leading role by identifying and communicating best practice and minimum standards, and, where necessary, sponsoring studies to investigate the effectiveness of innovative management solutions.

One apparent important omission from the consultation document concerns the occupational risks faced by nurses and other healthcare workers due to healthcare associated infections.

For example, life-threatening infections are faced by healthcare workers, on a daily basis, due to accidental injuries with contaminated needles. A needle stick injury occurs when the skin is punctured with a needle that may be contaminated with a patient's blood. Contaminated needles can transmit more than 20 dangerous blood-borne pathogens, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.

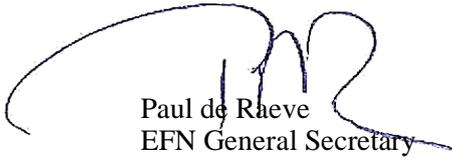
One million needle stick injuries occur in the European Union every year, and following a needle stick injury nurses, and their families, face many months of emotional anguish, not knowing if a life-threatening infection will be acquired.

Independent studies have demonstrated that the risk of needle stick injuries can be significantly reduced with the introduction of preventative measures, including training and education, safer procedures and the use of medical technologies incorporating needle protection.

The escalating shortage of healthcare workers is a serious cause for concern throughout Europe. One of the reasons that nursing is not seen as an attractive career path is the unacceptable safety risks which are present in the workplace.

In view of the above, we suggest that the risks of occupational exposure to serious infections faced by healthcare workers should be included within the scope of the Commission's considerations.

Yours Sincerely,



Paul de Raeve
EFN General Secretary