



**THE EU HEALTH STRATEGY AND THE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR NURSES AND NURSING**

Plenary Address

by

Paul De Raeve

General Secretary, European Federation of Nurses Associations

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Mr. Chairman, Colleagues,
Ladies and gentleman,

Let me first thank the Organising Committee and the European Society of Gastroenterology and Endoscopy Nurses and Associates (ESGENA) for inviting the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) to participate in this significant event and to give the pan European Organisation for nurses and nursing the possibility to express its view and exchange with you its practical and political experience.

Let me start by explaining who EFN is:

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) was established in 1971 to represent the nursing profession and its interests to the European institutions, based on the nursing education and free movement directives being drafted by the Commission then. The mission of EFN is to promote and protect nurses and the nursing profession with particular reference to the EU. The strategy for working towards this mission includes influencing the institutions of the EU, working towards a unified voice for nursing in the EU, promoting the value of nursing and strengthening the relationships between National Nursing Associations and specialist nurses and other health care professionals.

EFN provides a broad platform for developing policy and practice and for influencing European Union decision making on all areas which affect nursing, including working conditions and the delivery of care. The work of the European Federation of Nurses Associations, its member organisations and members, continually contributes toward the realisation of the Commission's intentions regarding the advancement of public health activities in Europe.

Our current reality

Four months after the European Union Enlargement to ten new members, questions as mutual recognition of professional qualification, public health, health care services, the mobility of patients and health professions has never been so high on the political agenda of the member states, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, since those issues will have a significant impact on the development of Social and Health policy and the health care reform within the EU Member states.

We know, for example, that in the expanded EU there are some striking differences among member states in terms of health status, available resources, public health infrastructure, quality and equity of services provided, and access to quality information. At the same time, rulings of the European Court of Justice have facilitated movement of patients and health care professionals across EU member states, increasing integration, health policy challenges and expectations. Nevertheless, we will only be able to support and to facilitate a qualitative and equitable health service in the EU and Europe by a strategic contribution to the development of a sufficient, effective, competent and motivated workforce of health professions, in particular nurses.

Health promotion and disease prevention is an important part of the work of nurses, which are able to initiate and carry out measures aimed at improving the health and preventing the occurrence of ill-health in the individual patient and initiate and carry out preventive measures against diseases and other health problems, such as smoking, legal and illegal drug-misuse and alcohol habits. Specially trained nurses may be responsible for the care of patients with a range of specific diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma etc.

Nurses view the patient from a holistic perspective, considering the patient's environment and lifestyle and are able to identify physical, mental, social and cultural health-risks, and there upon assess the patient's need for nursing care and support, paying attention to cultural and spiritual needs. Through establishing a dialogue with the individual, nurses assess which contributions, such as preventive measures, patients can carry out themselves or with the support of their surroundings; inform and educate patients and their families about how they can influence their environment or lifestyle and, when necessary, refer patients to another authority for help or support; motivate patients to alter their lifestyle when appropriate and lead and support local community action on health, including the influence of policy. Nurses base their work on science and reliable experience and strive to improve or maintain health and, despite illness, achieve a state of optimal well-being based on the needs and conditions of each individual.

Nurses relate their knowledge about the environment to the health problems found in the population and provide both preventive interventions and treatment. Nurses are able to address patients' problems faster and more effectively. The basic reason is that nurses are maintaining strong links between the individual, the family, the community and the whole health care system. Nurses explore new and better ways of keeping the citizens well, or improving health and preventing disease and disability. The nurses are used to enhance the ability of the patients to make informed decisions about best disease management. Care and rehabilitation require active collaboration among the various levels of health services and professions, as well as among the different organisations in society. Through home and school visits, nurses provide outreach services and develop area profiles of the districts where they work, describing the living conditions as regards the environment and resources in the area.

Building public health in the EU

How health professionals can help building public health in the EU?

Building public health is fundamentally a collaborative and synergistic initiative drawing on the knowledge and experience of a cast of characters – a cast that includes health professionals, members of the public, policy-makers, NGOs, and many other stakeholders.

EFN believe that to build public health in Europe health professionals must:

1. Build capacity

There are many important ways to build capacity – for example, in terms of public health institutions, where they are lacking, and within communities, but also in health professionals' knowledge in the area of public health and share of expertise for the benefit of the broad health care constituency. Education in public health at baccalaureate, masters and doctoral levels, as well as continuing education to upgrade knowledge, are essential to move the public health policy agenda forward and to ensure a workforce that can help drive change and deliver quality.

With these goals in mind, EFN has been a key partner in the development of a European project focused on "Public Health in Nursing" entitled 'Developing a continuing professional development programme in public health for nurses' initiated by EFN and developed in co-operation with Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General (DG SANCO) of the European Commission who co-funded it. The aim of the project, which involved national nurses associations throughout the EU, is to improve the level of nurses' qualification in the field of Public Health. The variation and evolution of nurses' initial training in each country of the EU and the considerable transformation that health care has undergone during these last 30 years makes compulsory to provide these professionals with means of power to add and improve to their original expertise in terms of primary, secondary and tertiary Health.

Due to the important number of nurses within the EU, they are an almost vital link in promoting and educating within every health system of members countries of the EU. These professionals'

qualifications, at the crossroads of not only medical techniques but also sociological, psychological and educational fields, destine them as natural actors in public health actions.

In France, this extra public health training for nurses has resulted in a school-based skin cancer prevention campaign, one that aims to increase children's awareness of the risks attending overexposure to UV radiation and improve and adapt their attitudes in this area. So here we have a continuing education programme that clearly benefits nurses, children and overall public health in the EU.

Another specific project being held in France concerns obesity. The growing number of overweight and obese children at national and international level is a real problem. Primarily associated with the adoption of an industrialised way of life that promotes excessive food intake and discourages physical activity, obesity is an item where nurses have an ideal opportunity to improve health-promoting activities in order to reduce the risks for children and adults of being overweight or obese. Therefore, a strong public health approach by nurses among young people, for example, is important to prevent obesity at local, national and international levels.

Finally, tobacco among young people is also an important item. Globally, young people are starting to smoke at younger and younger ages. The health risks of smoking are directly related to the age of tobacco initiation and the length of dependence, since for those who start smoking at younger ages it is harder to stop smoking and maintaining abstinence. Nurses are uniquely positioned to enhance prevention and cessation strategies, as they see millions of people everyday in a variety of settings and situations. Nurses have the opportunity and competence to assess smoking status, advice on the ill-health effects of smoking, and assist in smoking cessation. Therefore, tobacco campaign in schools and information on the risks of smoking seem to be the best ways to prevent younger and younger people to start smoking.

EFN has ended phase two of this successful project (DG Sanco) and is now preparing a new project entitled 'Public Health Training in the Context of an Enlarging Europe', aiming to make a contribution to the health of European citizens through supporting and combining the contributions from different professional public health groups within Europe.

2. Tackle the determinants of health

Tackling the determinants of health means tackling issues such tobacco use, the environment and poverty. As we know, socioeconomic status is a key determinant of health. When people are unable to meet their most basic needs, they are more susceptible to disease and early death. EFN believes that a coordinated European health professions strategy for fighting social exclusions, gender inequities, poverty and the disparities between Europe's regions is essential.

3. Empower the public

Europe's citizens have access to a variety of products and services that maintain or improve their health. The citizens require different types of information, presented in different ways and formats depending on a range of literacy, cultural, educational and social needs. Effective education allows consumers and patients to take on more responsibility for the management of their disease, autonomy and improving their quality of life. Empowerment of patients only occurs when patients have sufficient information to understand their condition, changing needs, options available and sources of information.

Nurses have a significant role to play in providing this validated information, face to face, in an understandable language, at the appropriate time for the patient and within the optimal environment. Developing the right information strategy is needed because information overload may prevent its usage and put a burden on the nursing resources. The source of information, how the information is validated and how information is presented, need to be certified in order to define the line between informing and advertising consistently across the EU.

A well-educated population knows where to find new knowledge, information, technology and the

best suited service provider. The more informed patients are, the better they understand their treatment. Nurses can assess the level of self management, inform and educate patients and their families about how they can influence their environment or lifestyle and motivate patients to alter their lifestyle when appropriate.

4. Share best practices

It is important that nurses share best practices with colleagues – within and across disciplines, and borders. From a public health perspective everyone benefits as nurses share information and strategies with patients.

5. Spend wisely

As nurses recommend policy initiatives aimed at creating a Europe of Health, EFN believe that health professionals also have a responsibility to share their experiences on how to spend wisely.

In the UK, for example, NHS Direct is a free call-in service for all citizens, staffed by nurses and delivering first line response to both the urgent and daily public health needs. This service is cost-effective, universally accessible, with rapid response, and works to strengthen citizen's ability to manage their own health needs. A similar service has been put in place in Portugal for paediatric which have produced successful public health outcomes at low cost.

6. Invest in innovation

We must invest in innovation because without innovation we stagnate. Innovation is about thinking creatively, about having a broader view and curiosity. It is above all improving health care.

In the UK for example, a nurse practitioner was recently named one of the 20 most successful innovators in the National Health Service. She observed that in a nearby community few people had cars, and getting to the nearest doctor's office meant taking two buses. She asked a local minister to join her in applying for government funding to start a clinic, which they eventually set up in his church. Her initiative led to health care in the heart of the community.

If we are to achieve our Europe of Health we must foster this type of 'outside the box' thinking. We must support a culture of innovation in health care.

7. Engage in workforce planning

As part of this process, we absolutely must engage in workforce planning at the policy level. Each profession has its own challenges, balance and appropriate skill mix within the workforce. European reunification is challenging us to examine how we work, as well as where we live and work. Mobility could facilitate skills and knowledge exchange and a redistribution of health professionals for improved effect. And while we need to ensure liberal freedom of movement is maintained to facilitate employment and equal opportunities, we must also protect quality of care, educational standards and the development of public health sectors across the entire EU to eliminate disparities.

The health care professions also need to identify and share successful recruitment and retention strategies and evaluate their transferability across Europe, as well as to explore the role of the health professions within Europe's future social system, which will be based on criteria such as competition, harmonisation, accountability, effectiveness and solidarity.

8. Promote the economic case for investment in public health

'Health means wealth,' not just in qualitative terms, but in solid economic terms. A healthy society is a more confident and productive society, one that draws less on health care spending

and welfare payments. We need to remind citizens, businesses, policy makers and governments of this at every opportunity.

Conclusion:

All health care professionals, including nurses, must be prepared for future challenges and ensure they are equipped with the proper skills to enable them to help in promoting population health and preventing disease. Part of the professional responsibility of nurses is to promote an environment where the value of the individual is respected. Such an effort includes responsibilities to involve the individual, the family and the society. Nurses have a basic responsibility to promote health, prevent disease, restore health and reduce suffering.

EFN believes that it is a governmental responsibility to ensure that:

- Proper education is available for health care professionals;
- The new and agreed priorities of EU public Health Policy must be reflected in Community research and development framework programme;

Future solutions to health care problems require such insight. This must be considered as resources are allocated within the health care sector.