

Quality and Safety Credentialing!

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Within the current climate of austerity, the quality and safety of healthcare services and delivery process must be more than ever safeguarded. As politicians and policy-makers have taken the financial and economic crisis as an opportunity to cut health and education budgets, credentialing become part of those business cases of high competitive nature next to guaranteeing service to make informed decisions. More than ever, credentialing becomes a brand.

Quality and safety are recognised as key values in establishing accessible, effective and responsive health systems and as such need to drive the reengineering of the health system towards a patient centred approach. Bringing cost-effective e-health services and innovative models of integrated care into credentialing, where social and health care needs are simultaneously embraced, will speed up change and guide users in the consistent deployment throughout the EU. We need clear and evidence based guidelines as the basis for further development.

Delivering high quality and safe services to our communities will not happen by chance, but only by choice. One major step forward to improve quality and patient safety is the Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross-border Healthcare, providing a set of rules for facilitating the access to safe and high-quality cross-border healthcare, through a stronger cooperation between Member States. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure that EU care pathway guidelines, educational requirements and healthcare outcomes are met at European level. This domain of innovation correlates strongly with citizens and patient empowerment and engagement.

Nurses are an obvious and fundamental link between hospitals, primary care and social services and play a key role ensuring the continuity of care beyond sectorial boundaries. In order to improve the access and cooperation on high quality and safe healthcare, the Directive proposes the creation of European reference networks, where nursing sensitive criteria shall be recognised as part of the innovative solution. The main driver of this cost-effective and innovative approach is the design of a European accreditation mechanism, as is already the case in other sectors.

A specific domain to safeguard quality and safety is to explore pro-actively the skill mix, task shifting, nurse-patient ratio's and extended roles as key components of the credentialing equation². Although current legislative and regulatory arrangements in most 28 EU states are not yet ready to recognise and position themselves on new roles for nurses in the healthcare system, reformists debates move towards new designs, nurse led healthcare settings focusing on cost-effectiveness and patient empowerment. Those Member States implementing for instance nurse e-prescribing are proven to be a good example of cost-saving, self- management, increased quality and patient safety³.

Finally, the increased mobility of nurses and patients across the EU calls for consistent standards in healthcare in terms of education, skills, code of practice, clinical pathways and outcomes. Streamlining the standards for a trustful mobility is enhanced by the ongoing modernisation of the Directive 2005/36/EC, but we need to ensure that European health systems built on a highly

educated nursing workforce to ensure that quality and safety remains at the centre of patient care. Therefore, in order to anticipate and define common standards in terms of the nursing workforce skills, a collaborative and official platform at EU level should be put in place to enable dialogue and consensus, and to act as innovative stimuli for all Member States designing a European skills panorama.

Within a culture of austerity, going beyond exchange of best practices is urgently needed. The European ambitious goals are jeopardised by soft policies, whereas EU currently needs the establishment of standards and harmonised mechanisms. The only way to ensure high level of patient quality and safety is a solid and political EU commitment to put in place innovative and strong solutions. Having a look at the US approach towards the health system reform, a EU-US Memorandum of Understanding on Health Care Systems, including quality and safety could move stakeholders, politicians and policy-makers a step forward to strengthen improvements in the health systems that will lead to visible results to everyone. Trade is pressures for elected politicians, health and healthcare are pressures for voters.

References:

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