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MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN FORUM OF MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS AND WHO

Summary Report on a WHO Meeting

Budapest, 10-11 February 1994

ABSTRACT

The third meeting of the European Forum of National Medical Associations and WHO was held in Budapest in February 1994. Some 80 leaders of national medical associations participated, representing 32 of the 45 member and potential member associations invited to attend from throughout the WHO European Region. With observers from Canada and supranational associations and newly formed national medical associations from newly independent states (NIS) and countries of central and eastern Europe (CCEE) this was the largest meeting held so far. The Forum discussed the problems of developing or modifying health care systems following the previous year's consideration of the problems of financing health care. Using as the basis for discussion the experience of Hungary in setting up a new system, and complemented by experiences in Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of modifying existing systems, members were able to analyse current trends in many countries. Key presentations on AIDS/HIV positivity in physicians and on new threats of infectious diseases in Europe provoked lively discussions and led to two statements on these issues. In a new initiative one session was devoted to parallel workshops on quality of care. The Forum later agreed to set up a quality action group to carry forward further actions by national medical associations on quality of care. A further statement on tobacco and health stressed the need for action to limit passive smoking and the need to increase taxes on tobacco and to prohibit tobacco advertising. An action group was also set up to carry forward measures by national medical associations to support tobacco control. Welcoming statements by representatives of national medical associations from the countries of the former Yugoslavia and recognizing the work of physicians in the war zones, the Forum adopted a statement condemning obstacles to the passage of medical supplies and the restriction of water and electricity supplies as a weapon of war. Great interest was shown in the potential presented by the use of Internet as a telecommunication tool for professional education. The Forum welcomed the newly formed national medical associations and, in a new initiative, complemented its work with a post-Forum meeting for national medical associations from NIS and CCEE which permitted an exchange between well established and newly emerging national medical associations on their organization, functioning, role and financing.

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TARGET 37

PARTNERS FOR HEALTH

By the year 2000, in all Member States, a wide range of organizations and groups throughout the public, private and voluntary sectors should be actively contributing to the achievement of health for all.

Keywords

SOCIETIES, MEDICAL
COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL
SMOKING – prevention and control
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
QUALITY ASSURANCE, HEALTH CARE
CCEE
NIS

STATEMENT ON INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN EUROPE

The European Forum of National Medical Associations and WHO, meeting in Budapest on 10–11 February 1994,

CONCERNED about the upward trend in the incidence of a number of preventable infectious diseases, with consequent potential for increased morbidity and mortality from these conditions;

NOTING that there are countries with unacceptably low immunization rates, and that the emergence of armed conflict has also produced substantial reductions in the immunization rates in the population at large in certain countries, and, in particular, in children;

URGES national medical associations:

- to encourage the development of national public health policies to reduce the incidence of infectious disease in line with WHO European regional target 5;
- to encourage their members to:
 - recognize the value of immunization;
 - inform patients about preventing infectious disease through immunization and other preventive actions;
 - collaborate in carrying out immunization (following nationally recommended schedules) to achieve the highest possible immunization rates;
 - complete notification of infectious diseases where this is provided for in their countries.

The Forum is also concerned about the availability of supplies of high quality vaccine to carry out the necessary immunizations and urges the relevant authorities to ensure that vaccines are available.

STATEMENT ON IMMUNIZATION OF CHILDREN

The European Forum of National Medical Associations and WHO, meeting in Budapest on 10–11 February 1994,

DEEPLY CONCERNED about the alarming increase in the morbidity and spread of transmissible diseases;

RE-EMPHASIZES the right of children to be protected from infectious diseases by immunization, and the duty of parents, doctors and governments to ensure that this can be done.

STATEMENT ON TOBACCO AND HEALTH

The European Forum of National Medical Associations and WHO, meeting in Budapest on 10-11 February 1994, adopted the following statement on tobacco and health.

Tobacco consumption constitutes a major risk for health and a cause of premature death.

The Forum therefore, bearing in mind the Forum's declaration of Basel (1992) on tobacco;

REAFFIRMS the negative consequences of passive smoking and the necessity to extend and respect nonsmoking areas in public places;

CALLS ON governments to take strict legislative action in order to:

- prohibit advertising of tobacco, particularly in central and eastern European countries;
- heavily tax tobacco products, a uniquely effective intervention.

STATEMENT ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE WAR-DEVASTATED POPULATIONS IN THE COUNTRIES OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The European Forum of National Medical Associations and WHO, meeting in Budapest on 10–11 February 1994, adopted the following statement concerning humanitarian assistance to the war-devastated populations in the countries of former Yugoslavia.

1. The Forum notes with great satisfaction and strongly endorses the statements of 28 December 1993 by the representatives of the national medical associations of the countries which have emerged from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (reaffirming the ethical principles of medical practice and the duties of physicians to those suffering from the effects of armed conflict).
2. The Forum expresses its admiration and support for the dedicated work of physicians, both nationals and non-nationals of the affected states, carried out under the most appalling conditions and without even the minimum of necessary resources.
3. The Forum condemns the continuing creation of obstacles to the free passage of medical supplies and equipment needed to provide humanitarian assistance to the sick and injured, and calls on all authorities to ensure that these obstacles are removed.

It also condemns the use of restriction of water and electricity supplies to innocent civilians as a weapon of war.

4. The Forum appeals to political leaders and governments to guarantee freedom of communication to medical associations and freedom of movement to physicians and other health personnel to allow maximum cooperation in the provision of medical services to the wounded and in the fight against disease.
5. The Forum has made clear its horror at the appalling consequences of armed aggression and violence against innocent civilians in 1992 and 1993. One year later death and suffering are increasing even more. In its frustration at this continuing suffering the Forum calls on those international agencies that have the power, by whatever means, to bring about an immediate and genuine cease-fire. A cease-fire is, however, only one step in the progress to peace.
6. The Forum therefore once again calls on the warring parties, all governments, nongovernmental organizations and the international community to take forceful steps to bring about a permanent cessation of hostilities and, by encouraging peaceful reconciliation, bring about cooperation to reduce human suffering and further damage to the health of innocent citizens.

STATEMENT ON QUALITY OF CARE

Recommendations for national medical associations regarding quality of care development (QCD).

The European Forum of Medical Associations and WHO strongly recommends that national medical associations (NMAs) should take a leading role in designing quality of care development policies with the overall aim of benefiting patient care. NMAs and WHO recognize that securing quality of medical care is primarily the responsibility of the physicians themselves. QCD is therefore both an ethical, educational and professional responsibility that is inherent to the independence of the profession.

To achieve this, NMAs should:

- promote the professional responsibility for QCD and institute the establishment of internal self-evaluative mechanisms among their members;
- promote the development of strategic quality markers by the individual specialties, including consideration of the personal experience of patients;
- institute external quality evaluation, which should include mechanisms for support, supervision and the establishment of protected comparative databases, retrieved from appropriate recording of patient-care data, managed by the profession to ensure that confidentiality for both patient and physician is guaranteed;
- disseminate information on best demonstrated practice and promote its constructive application;
- promote the description of good practice, for example by consensus conferences and other methods that produce statements on medical care, that can be used as reference in evaluative mechanisms; and
- acknowledge that, apart from the fact that research is the basis for QCD, there is need for research on QCD itself.