

EUnetHTA Conference: HTA's Future in Europe

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The medical practice was not always based on scientific evidence. Until quite recently, therapeutic interventions were justified mostly by tradition, routine and what was called professional experience. But this has changed in the last few decades, especially due to the progress allowed by the use of health technology assessment. This tool helps providers of care choose the best solutions for their patients by enabling them to practice evidence based medicine. It also helps decision makers choose the best interventions to be provided for the whole population in order to optimise its health status.

All European Union countries made tremendous progress in the process of Health Technology Assessment. With the entering into force of Maastricht and then Amsterdam treaties, the need for the European Union to improve exchanges of information in these fields became more and more obvious. After having encouraged several projects in this direction (for instance Eur Assess, HTA Europe, ECHTA), the European Commission took up the challenge and targeted Health Technology Assessment as a political priority. In 2004, the European Commission proposed to Member States and other European countries and organisations to build up a network - EUnetHTA - enabling an effective exchange of information with the purpose of developing the methodology of epidemiological studies and clinical trials, finalising practical tools and helping decision making processes in public health policy.

More recently, the European Commission included into its draft Directive on the application of patients' rights in to cross-border healthcare, the intention to establish a permanent network for health technology assessment, in order to encourage cooperation between competent authorities, supply and exchange of reliable data and improve the decision making process by member States.

The result of EUnetHTA's activities is an important achievement: the proof will be the presentation during today's meeting of the outcomes of various projects conducted by the network.

The conference is thus the occasion to underline not only what was accomplished but also, and perhaps especially, to assert the necessity to continue and develop this fruitful collaboration. As an example, one of the fields of health technology assessment in which a European collaboration is still needed is the evaluation of pharmaceutical products, even if the methods of evaluation were developed earlier than in other sectors. The assessment of their Relative Effectiveness is an essential tool, used in all European countries, for health care decisions. In accordance with the position expressed by the French Minister of health, Roseline Bachelot, during the Pharmaceutical Forum held on the 2nd of October 2008, we would encourage the continuation of this work by an existing network. Would EUnetHTA not be the best choice for this very network?

I wish this conference dedicated to the future of Health Technology Assessment to be a great success and I thank the organizers for their initiative and all the participants for their presence.