



## Economics of Health

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Good morning Ladies and Gentleman, it is my great pleasure to be here on behalf of the European Patients' Forum, the umbrella of patients' organisations across the European Union. Our vision is high quality, patient centred, **equitable** healthcare for all EU patients and this is the very essence of today's debate.

How we prioritize healthcare in today's economic crisis, that becomes tragically, a real social crisis in a number of EU countries, I believe, is an acid test for how we manage increasing demands on healthcare in the future. Austerity measures are of course critical – but slashing health budgets to the point where patients simply cannot afford the care they need is NOT the answer. We, at EPF are learning of the dramatic and unacceptable consequences for patients and their families in several regions, that will lead ultimately to many more direct and indirect costs for governments and society.

Rescue packages cannot only be about restoring financial stability – equally fundamental is the stability of society, the long term confidence and trust of citizens and this is most closely reflected in access to the healthcare they need. International institutions and Governments must recognise this and ensure that health budgets are protected in stabilisation and development packages.

Often forgotten in the current discourse about the sustainability of healthcare systems that tends to focus on health economics and health efficacy are two core issues – the enormous and unjustifiable health inequalities that currently exist and the fundamental role of the patient, him or herself. We can no longer simply talk about health and wealth – for sustainable systems and for a sustainable society we need health, wealth **and** equity.

I would argue, not surprisingly, that patients, as the ultimate beneficiary of health systems, can contribute significantly to addressing the challenge of meeting increasing demand and ensuring equity of access and availability. Patient organisations are key stakeholders that should be involved systematically in the development of patient-centred health policy making in all arenas. This will really harness the patient's own experience, expertise, and 'evidence base' to ensure optimum healthcare delivery, in both quality and cost terms.

Access to high quality information in a way that makes it useful for the patient is critical to move towards health equity, empowerment and patient-centred healthcare in modern society. There are however major differences across EU Member States on how empowerment is perceived and prioritized.

Coherent strategies to embed Health literacy as a political and programmatic priority in countries, I believe, has enormous potential in relation to primary prevention, health promotion and effective disease management systems where the patient can be a real partner in determining their healthcare. Empowerment is also about productive dialogue

between the patient and health professional, leading to better and more cost –effective health outcomes.

I believe that patient organisations have a valid contribution to make in relation to health technology assessment – to enhance understanding concerning the impact of therapies on quality of life of patients and their families and their ability to continue to contribute as productive members of society. The transparency of Health Technology Assessment processes , through, for example, meaningful patient involvement, will also enhance the Public's trust and confidence in such processes, even if they do not agree always with the decisions made.

Another important arena to explore carefully is the patient's perception of risk. This can differ greatly from that of the policy maker, the payer and even the health professional. I am not suggesting that patient safety measures are circumvented – but they should certainly be ' fit for purpose' and thus avoid costly, sometimes life threatening delays in treatments.

Finally, I would like to highlight that exploring the potential of e-health and telemedicine to benefit patients is extremely high on EPF's agenda and we are working closely with the European Commission and other stakeholders on building trust and acceptance in e-health and telemedicine solutions that are practicable, ethical, and cost effective but first and foremost enhance the empowerment and dignity of patients.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have covered but a few areas on where including the patients' perspective can help to contribute to the enormous challenges facing governments and societies – and where the unity and solidarity of a patients' movement can really make a difference. Thank you for your attention and I look forward to the debate.

