



EFN PRESS RELEASE

Nursing leaders visit European Parliament to support initiative for safer working conditions

Brussels, 17.00 hrs CET, Monday 3 July 2006

The Executive Committee of the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) visited the European Parliament to meet with Liz Lynne MEP (see www.efnweb.org), to add their support to the Parliament initiative to protect European healthcare workers from potentially fatal bloodborne viruses, such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, caused by injuries with contaminated needles.

Substantially more than one million occupational injuries with contaminated needles are suffered by nurses and other healthcare workers in the European Union each year. The majority of these injuries are avoidable, with the implementation of safer working practices and available medical technology, yet employers have been slow to implement.

The European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs has produced an own initiative report(2006/2015 (INI)), with recommendations to the European Commission, calling for amendment to the Directive 2000/54, concerning the safety of workers exposed to biological agents, to include specific measures to prevent exposure to patients' blood caused by needlestick injuries.

Liz Lynne commented:

"It is not acceptable that health workers are put in such severe danger when it can easily be prevented. I can imagine the mental stress that a nurse will have to suffer following a contaminated needle accidentally puncturing their skin, waiting for many months to discover if a life-threatening infection has been acquired or not. A small amendment to the Directive 2000/54/EC will make a big difference to the safety and well-being of Europe's nurses."

Paul De Raeve (Secretary General of the EFN) commented:

"There are excellent examples in the EU and beyond, where legislation has substantially reduced the occupational exposure of healthcare workers to contaminated blood. Independent academic studies have demonstrated very significant reductions in needlestick injuries, as well as overall cost effectiveness. It is generally acknowledged that the applicable worker safety directive has failed to protect healthcare workers, and therefore it must be urgently improved. The lives of Europe's 6 million nurses are at stake".

Annette Kennedy (President of the EFN) commented:

"We congratulate the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, and the rapporteur Stephen Hughes, on the progress recently made in committee, resulting in an overwhelming majority in favour of the measures recommended in the Needlestick Report (2006/2015 (INI)), including the votes of all major political groups, and sincerely hope that this will ensure the support of all groups in the Plenary vote in July."

Liz Lynne MEP has been a leading supporter of the initiative to protect Europe's healthcare workers from needlestick injuries over a period of several years, following a visit to a hospital in her local constituency, and was the sponsor of an awareness raising event in the European Parliament on World AIDS Day in December 2004, attended by healthcare workers from 7 member states.

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