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European Commission
Secretariat General - Unit D1
European Commission
B - 1049 Brussels
Belgium

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Concern: European Commission Public consultation on the future EU 2020 strategy

Dear Commissioner,

The European Federation of Nurses' Associations (EFN) is working to achieve high quality and equitable health in the EU by a strategic contribution of an effective, competent and motivated workforce of nurses. Nurses are at the very heart of an effective quality healthcare system and the six million nurses in the EU will play a key role in ensuring that the EU 2020 strategy can be delivered.

Projections¹ for the future indicate that the current lack of qualified nurses will persist until 2020, unless the issue is addressed in a wide number of policy areas. The challenge of a changing demography yielding an ageing society in the EU Member States will also put higher demands on the health sector and notably on nurses, making effective healthcare workforce planning essential.

EFN welcomes this opportunity to provide its perspective on the future EU 2020 strategy. The smart, green and dynamic economy that the strategy is aiming for must be built on the fundamental pillars of justice and health. In 2020, nurses will be working to make people healthier, and whilst we will not all be healthy, none of us should be denied decent healthcare on the grounds of a lack of wealth.

The EFN has good ideas that can help put the 2020 strategy into practice and hope to have the occasion to share these at more length. For now, we would just like to take this opportunity to highlight three areas where the EU 2020 Strategy needs to be strengthened to ensure patients access to high quality healthcare also in the year 2020.

¹ See "[The Looming Crisis of the Health Workforce: How can OECD countries respond](#)", OECD, 2008 for an international perspective; and "[A Quantitative Tool for Workforce Planning in Healthcare: Example Simulations](#)", Training and Employment Authority, Ireland, 2009, for a national perspective.

EU2020 theme (1): Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

1. Quality Education makes movement possible

People in all countries need healthcare at certain points in their lives and good health is high on everyone's wish list. A recent study showed that a slight increase of 10% in the proportion of nurses holding a Bachelors Degree in Nursing reduced the risk of patient death by 5%. Hospitals with low nurse staffing levels tend to have higher rates of poor patient outcomes. This means that the education system needs to provide not only the numbers needed but also a high quality standard.

Within the EU market, shortage of nurses means that recruitment is done across national borders and also from beyond the EU. It is essential for the free movement of job seekers that their education corresponds to recognised standards and criteria for the profession. Strengthening education is not only "*one of the most effective ways of fighting inequality and poverty*" (EU 2020, page 5), it is also a fundamental requirement for efficient healthcare systems. To ensure an open job market and high quality services, the EFN would like to see a stronger commitment:

- › To enforce equal standards for nursing education in all EU Member States and a system for mutual recognition of diplomas; and,
- › To support EU wide initiatives for peer review and learning mechanisms within the healthcare sector.

EU2020 Themes (2) and (3): Empowering people in inclusive societies and creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

2. Skills mix and workforce planning

A strong case can be made for the need for better international monitoring and communication about health workforce policy and movements of health professionals across countries, with a view to diagnosing potential imbalances between demand and supply in the global market for health workers and improving the prospects for international co-ordination.

Such co-ordination could help avoid the "export of workforce shortage" within and beyond the EU, a situation which puts excessive burden on the poorest countries in the world. To achieve an effective and sustainable EU health workforce strategic foresight is needed. A coordinated effort in improving health workforce monitoring and planning between national authorities, educational institutions and professional organisations could go a long way in avoiding over-supply and shortage in the healthcare sector.

Further, ever evolving training needs and technological advances make it necessary to consider the skill mix needed in healthcare facilities. Continuous professional development in the nursing sector is a good social investment as it simultaneously increases quality at an individual level and meet changing needs on an institutional level.

The EU 2020 strategy highlights the importance of 'flexicurity' on the labour market. The EFN recognises this as a useful concept also within the healthcare sector. Healthcare systems development puts new demands on existing jobs and requires new positions. In order to make possible the matching of "*future skills to future needs*" (EU 2020, page 6), the EFN would like to see:

- › The establishment of a European research centre dedicated to monitoring the workforce in the nursing sector in the EU and in the world; and the establishment of an EU Human Resource Planning Strategy for Nurses;
- › Continuous professional development of nurses and effective mechanisms for the transfer of knowledge, good practice and skills within the sector; and,
- › The future Social Dialogue focusing on concerns related to Nursing Workforce.

3. Patient safety

In the healthcare sector, safety in the workplace carries a double responsibility. It is about safety for the patients and safety for the practitioners. This puts special requirements on education and training, on planning and management and on working cultures. A competitive single market for healthcare services is clearly a logical development in the coming years but EFN would like to recognise that this cannot be at the expense of patient safety, service delivery standards or the exclusion of those unable to seize new opportunities in such a market. The emergence of healthcare services being provided over the internet (e.g. e-health) is of course a positive development but it is also a slice of the healthcare sector which must abide by the same standards and criteria for quality and safety as the other parts.

The EFN wishes to underline the fundamental importance of safety and quality as basic parameters for an effective healthcare sector. Nurses are the largest occupational group in the EU health sector and are the key to initiating change and improvement at local and national levels. EFN would like to see:

- › Patients' safety included as a core part of all health education and in the assessments of service delivery facilities; and,
- › Concrete support for research and exchange of results between EU member states and healthcare facilities to further enhance good practice in patient safety.

Working together

The EFN believes that the vision expressed in the "EU 2020" strategy on how to ensure a vibrant, connected and inclusive social market economy is to be recognised as both bold and realistic and would like to note that its realisation cannot be achieved without the nurses of Europe on board. We look forward to working together with you.

Best regards,



Paul De Raeve
Secretary General
European Federation of Nurses' Associations

