



## EFN Position Paper on "Patient Empowerment"

The EFN is committed to support and advocate for strategies and policies that place "patient empowerment" at the centre of healthcare design in order to maintain and improve high quality, safe, and efficacious services.

Patient and public empowerment in the healthcare context is understood as a multi-dimensional process helping the individual to gain control over their own lives so that the individual's potential for health and well-being is maximised, increasing the capacity of the individual to act on health issues relevant for themselves and joint responsibility is taken for achieving agreed-upon outcomes.<sup>i</sup> It is also a process through which individuals and groups are able to express their needs, present their concerns, devise strategies for involvement in decision-making and take political, social and cultural action to meet those needs<sup>ii</sup>. Therefore becoming a process of collective action when it involves patients and citizens in designing and developing service and participating in policy making. Thus, helping people to assert control over related factors that affect their health.

The EFN believes that patient empowerment and engagement are central for realising self-management and orienting citizens to actively contribute to their own health improvement and well-being.

Nurses through regular sustained direct patient contact, appropriate support and health coaching can make a significant contribution to supporting patient empowerment.

Therefore, the EFN members call on the governments to:

- Optimise patient care and outcomes by ensuring that patients and their advocates are as a matter of course involved in the redesign of national and pan-European health care systems and arrangements. As such, it is important to create and promote the use of a shared understanding and common approach to patient empowerment and engagement. A critical component of patient empowerment is dependent on the engagement as agents of policy development, implementation and law enforcement.
- Make patient empowerment and engagement a central plank of future European health legislation, supported by the establishment of a Cross-Commission taskforce. The engagement and involvement of patients and patient groups is a key step to achieving patient empowerment, and is widely recognized as a process through which individuals, and social groups, are enabled to express their needs, present their concerns and take political, social and cultural action to meet their health needs.
- Support the development of patient empowerment mechanisms across the EU, with specific focus on Cross-European standards for patient empowerment in clinical healthcare practices. Informing EU citizens about their cross-border health care rights is imperative for the improvement of patient empowerment and involvement within health care. An effective patient empowerment strategy must include health literacy in order to equip patients and citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to take an active role in managing their health and healthcare, and to enhance a productive and equal dialogue between patients and health professionals with a view to improved and more cost-effective health outcomes.
- Embed patient empowerment and engagement within the European education frameworks for health care professionals. Nurses (and health-care assistants) provide the majority of direct patient and citizens' care, and as such can play a pivotal role in advocating for patient empowerment across all elements of the EU's healthcare systems.

Nurses can deliver a substantial contribution to the increase of patient empowerment, which brings with it economic as well as qualitative improvements, and can help to create more sustainable health systems. Increased and improved patient empowerment and engagement can create space on which to build better public understanding of the challenges facing healthcare systems across the EU, and through these dialogues provides opportunities to improve healthcare systems. When practised well, it can cultivate trust between governments and the public, and increase the legitimacy of policy action and implementation. Put simply, patient empowerment and engagement is necessary for good governance.

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<sup>i</sup> Luttrell et al. (2009). Understanding and operationalising empowerment. London: Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>ii</sup> PaSQ. Joint Action on Quality and Safety. Glossary Framework. 2012.