



CITTADINANZATTIVA ONLUS - SEDE NAZIONALE
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THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE-COURSE VACCINATION TO ENHANCE PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTION IN EUROPE: A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH.

28th February 2018 - 11.00 -13.00
Room ASP A1E201 - European Parliament, Brussels

Mariano Votta's speech

Dear Institutions, experts, colleagues and friends,

Good morning and thanks a lot for joining us today, I recognize some of you that already have attended our event yesterday, focused on Cross-border Healthcare and European Reference Networks.

Also the today topic can be approached as a Cross-border Healthcare phenomenon and for this reason we have received the support of the MEPs Interest Group "European Patients' Rights and Cross-border Healthcare".

Unfortunately, I regret to inform you that the MEP David Borrelli, who hosts this event, and is one of the co-founder of this Interest Group, cannot attend anymore due a urgent matter.

Anyway, I am glad to remember that this Interest Group was encouraged in 2015 following the widespread request of almost 100 civic and patient organizations sent to the EU Parliament to recognize officially the value of citizens' initiatives involved for the promotion of the health as a common good.

And exactly this is the perspective of this meeting, that is ideally linked to the workshop "Seeking new partnerships for EU action on vaccination" organized by DG SANTE last May here in Bruxelles to explore how the cooperation at EU level can increase vaccine coverage, address shortages and strengthen routine immunisation programmes.

In that occasion, at the presence of the Health Commissioner Andriukaitis, participants stressed – among other topics - the importance to reinforce a new partnerships to tackle growing hesitancy in the EU, in order to better support efforts to strengthen a) education and training programmes for students, health professionals and schools; b) monitoring of vaccine confidence; c) technical capacities to deliver vaccine hesitancy tools; d) social/behavioural research related to the implementation of vaccination programmes, addressing for example needs related to communication/hesitancy or vaccine (cost) effectiveness.

At same time it was underlined the importance to promote access for a sustainable vaccine policies in the EU, for instance a) supporting efforts to strengthen vaccine demand and



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supply forecasting; b) monitoring vaccine safety; c) coordinating communication between stakeholders; last but not least d) encouraging a research to evaluate impact and effectiveness of alternative vaccine delivery models.

Just after that event, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the Agency of the European Union aimed at strengthening Europe's defences against infectious diseases, decided to officially invite my organization, a citizens organization, to join the ECDC Technical Advisory Group dealing with vaccine coverage.

This was extremely relevant not only because the Agency recognized our commitment on the topic, but mainly because the Agency testified to agree about our approach on the topic. In fact, in our perspective, vaccination is not intended only for patients but for the whole population, as a citizen right.

Vaccination is a right and an extraordinary instrument of public health, which must be known, valued, disseminated and used well in the interest of individuals and the community. Widespread vaccination has eradicated smallpox and made Europe polio-free. All EU Member States recommend vaccination against serious, sometimes life-threatening diseases. The scientific evidence is clear, so we need to base on these. However, some vaccines remain undervalued and under-used, and an increasing number of parents and citizens are choosing to delay or refuse vaccines. Widespread vaccine hesitancy has become a worrying phenomenon due to the range of health-related consequences it causes in the Member States.

Probably it was forgotten that vaccination is also correlated with duties and responsibilities: be active on vaccines! is our message.

Is it guaranteed the citizens right to be adequately informed about it? It is necessary to work to contribute to increase a vaccination culture. About it, Institutions have probably disinvested for too long, and now we have to face with the consequences.

Recent epidemiological data on the situation of vaccination in the Member States shows a significant drop in the use of vaccines. For instance, Europe observes a 4-fold increase in measles cases in 2017 compared to previous year, as the WHO remembered us some days ago. The highest numbers of measles cases were reported in Romania (5562), Italy (5006) and Ukraine (4767).

As the vaccination is arguably one of the most powerful and cost-effective types of primary prevention available to protect against a number of diseases, and I am sure the public bodies here present will underline this point later on, we strongly believe that adopting a life-course approach to vaccination may help maximise the benefits of vaccination for individuals, public health and society in general.

As mentioned in the Open Public Consultation on “Strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases” launched by the DG Santé, that we encourage to contribute by the first half of March, vaccine preventable diseases are major health scourges. Due to their cross-border nature and the challenges to national vaccination programmes, there is need for common EU action and more coordinated approaches to limit the spread of



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epidemics and cross border diseases. There is clear added-value to strengthen cooperation among all relevant actors at EU level, including health authorities, vaccine industry, research and innovation, healthcare sector and others. We are here today also to remember the decisive role of the civic society, of the citizens organization and the advocacy group in this challenge.

Are there specific rules of engagement to guarantee their contribution in the European Vaccine Action Plan, in the EU Joint Action for Vaccination?

We strongly invite the EU Commission to adopt this inclusive approach when in coming months will adopt a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Strengthened Cooperation against Vaccine Preventable Diseases.

And what about across Europe at national level? Are there good practices of cooperation promoted by Institutions as well as by professionals?

I am sure the debate today will help us to better identify a pragmatic way to better address common challenges faced by the EU Member States, and to increase the cooperation with all the stakeholder, civic and patients organizations included.

Before to finish please let me talk a little bit about my country, already mentioned for the increased number of measles.

I come from Italy as well as different panelist today, a country where new law on vaccination was recently introduced (some guests will talk about it later on), and where unfortunately – due the incoming election of the new Parliament next week - the topic of vaccination was also included in the pre-electoral debates with the risk of a political/idealistic not scientific approach about it.

Anyway, be quite, we do not have any intention to bring at EU level any pre-electoral countryside debates, on the contrary we are interested to explore the state of the art on vaccine coverage and immunization policy at EU level and across Europe in order to contribute to promote a multi-stakeholder approach in the challenges of life-course vaccination in EU, so in line with the message sent by the already mentioned initiative led by DG Santé.

Well, my turn is over, I just want to thank in advance all the panelist for their contributions, and a special thanks to Suzanne Wait who accepted the role of moderator today. She is Managing Director at “The Health Policy Partnership”, a London-based health policy research consultancy.

Suzanne has worked on a wide range of topics, including most recently life-course approaches to vaccination, viral hepatitis, oncology, and mental health, so is the right expert to chair today.

Thanks again for the attention. I wish you a fruitful meeting.