

Dear guests,

Dear fellow panellists,

I would like to thank you all for your presence.

And also thank the Interest Group *European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare*, the Active Citizenship Network and the European Headache Alliance for the co-organization of this event, wishing that it will give us important outcomes.

As a member of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, I am committed to this cause. Headache pain, as a chronic pain is a serious and a very debilitating disease that affects not only the patients and their families, but also has serious social and labour market impacts. European institutions should recognize it and here, at the European parliament, we are increasingly dedicated to this issue. In the scope of my action as a MEP I am fully available and interested in help the designing of European policies that aim to give conditions for people that suffer from this kind of pain. And I think that this conference it's one more step in that way.

We are here to identify and share the best practices. We are here to discuss concrete examples, experiences and criticalities found in the different European countries, because it's urgent to implement a long-term European policy in the fight against pain! It's urgent to define an European strategy to guarantee quality of life for people suffering from this disease, as well as to recognize and dignify the important role of their caregivers! We must move from good intentions to acts! The European Charter of Patients' Rights must be effectively recognized and respected by all countries. The Union and its Member States should be involved! Should improve the cooperation of all

European health systems with the aim of getting the best response and ensure the quality of the services provided by them.

We cannot forget that around 20% of European citizens are suffering from chronic pain at this moment, namely headache pain! They and their families are waiting for us, politicians, to boost policies that improve their quality of life - figures which should not leave us indifferent and which tend to get worse as a result of an aging population. As a public health problem, it is necessary to approach the issue comprehensively, by integrating its social dimension.

The physical, psychological and social consequences of this debilitating disease creates enormous integration challenges. Unemployment, low productivity and disinvestment in training are associated to a number of factors which include not only the physical condition but also the stigma because of the misunderstanding of their illness by society. As a consequence, we should consider the individual and family impact, such as lack of self-esteem, mental health problems, social exclusion and low economic empowerment. These patterns are worse when even the patients have a lack of knowledge about their disease and about the answers that could be provided. So we should ask for more share of information, even between patients! We should educate them and their families! Provide more information about the existing treatments! The society should also be more conscious about the disease and its effects!

Dear guests,

In the same line we should ask for more investigation! We should promote the Horizon 2020 Program, as an important European tool, with a budget of € 7.5 billion, for funding societal development, namely health, demographic change and well-being. An opportunity to research new diagnostic conditions and the application of innovative treatments and technologies for this disease that cannot be ignored.

We also need a more flexible labour market to integrate this people. A labour market that values them, that makes them feel useful and real contributors for European economy and for the development of the Union. People suffering from neurological diseases or chronic pain, like headache, cannot be discriminated by European labour market. We believe that there is an urgent need to clarify and disseminate patient rights, to undertake workplace adaptation and reintegration actions.

If on the first hand we are aware of the conditions of patients, on the other hand we should not forget the important role of the caregiver in the middle of this discussion. Informal caregivers make a priceless contribution that European policies must recognize too. We are talking about care for patients suffering from chronic pain, mostly provided at home, often by relatives or friends, in an unpaid way. Europe cannot ignore this effort and should start thinking about forward steps to get a common recognition of caregiver's work and the professionalization of this sector. Turning it into declared work, thereby contributing to raising the European employment rate and for the Union's economy.

European institutions are becoming more conscious for both! But we should continue our job! Multiply events like this! It is necessary to involve all the stakeholders: health professionals (scientists, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, among other specialists in the area). As well, patient and family associations, informal caregivers, politicians, representatives of health authorities and regulators, all moving in the same direction.

May this initiative be one step further to raising awareness! I call on all stakeholders to join forces so that we can influence and support the formulation of new European policies that will promote the well-being of people living with chronic pain, namely headache pain, and their families.

I am totally available to collaborate with all of you!

Thank you very much!