



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**NOTE**

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from: General Secretariat of the Council  
to: Council

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Subject: **Commission's High Level Group on Health services and Medical care**  
– Information from the Commission

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Delegations will find in the annex a note from the Commission on the above-mentioned subject, which will be dealt with under "any other business" at the Council meeting (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer affairs) on 5 and 6 December 2007.

**REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP  
ON HEALTH SERVICES AND MEDICAL CARE IN 2007****INFORMATION BY THE COMMISSION****1. INTRODUCTION**

As indicated in the 2006 Report on the work of the High Level Group ("2006 HLG Report"), recent developments regarding health services at the EU level have inevitably had an impact on the work of the High Level Group. The Commission indicated its intention to bring forward proposals to develop a Community framework for safe, high quality and efficient health services in 2007, on the basis of the public consultation held in 2006. Given the relevance of any such proposals for the work of the High Level Group it was indicated in the 2006 Report that the High Level Group would consider its appropriate future activities once the Commission's intentions were clearer. For example, once formal proposals on issues currently covered by the High Level Group are presented by the Commission, discussions on these issues should move to other appropriate forums (i.e. the Council). The High Level Group should then be ready to strengthen its focus on the remaining issues where it can still add significant value. However, those decisions would have to be taken once there is more clarity over the forthcoming proposals from the Commission.

Given the availability of the proposals on health services only towards the end of this year, it was decided not to convene any meetings of the plenary of the High Level Group in 2007 and to put the discussions on the future work of the High Level Group on hold. Nevertheless, some working groups continued their work through separate meetings or through other means. Useful work has been thus produced in 2007 and is described in more detail in the following Chapter.

**2. WORK UNDERWAY AND RESULTS OF THE WORK IN 2007****2.1. Cross-border healthcare purchasing and provision (including patient rights)**

The 2006 HLG Report indicated that given the forthcoming initiative on health services to be brought forward by the Commission in 2007 the working group should focus its work on areas that do not overlap with this initiative. Therefore the work plan for the future should be discussed once more information about Commission proposals will be available. On that basis work of this working group was put on hold and the working group did not meet in 2007.

## **2.2. Health professionals**

### *2.2.1. Outline plans for future work*

In the 2006 HLG Report the working group indicated its intention to continue focusing on the three priority areas: impacts of health professionals' mobility; principles of international recruitment; and continued professional development. In 2007, the Commission announced for 2008 a new initiative on a Health Workforce in Europe, which may build on the work of the working group so far. The working group met once in 2007, in September. It discussed how most efficiently would the work of the working group feed into the 2008 Commission initiative. For that purpose a questionnaire will be developed by the Commission and send to the working group members for their responses.

## **2.3. European reference networks**

In the 2006 HLG Report the following priorities have been identified for 2007:

- Firstly, the working group should follow closely the pilot projects on the European reference networks supported under the 2006 Call for proposals and use the practical experience gained from these pilot projects in its future work. The working group should also consider how the principles developed and experience gained so far mainly in the context of rare diseases could be applied to other areas beyond rare diseases (for example to therapeutic and technology innovations).
- Secondly, the working group should further focus on outstanding legal and financial aspects of ERN.
- Finally, the working group should examine whether and how the work on ERN could benefit from or could be linked with the upcoming EU initiative on health services.

The working group met twice in 2007, in March and in June. As regards the first objective, the working group invited already twice project leaders of the five pilot projects supported under the 2006 Call for proposals for working group meetings, in order establish close cooperation and to get immediate feedback about the practical experience gained in the course of implementation of the pilot projects. In addition, the working group developed in 2007 a questionnaire which will be distributed to the project leaders, in order to receive structured responses on the practical implementation of the concept of the ERN.

As regards the second and third issue, the working group agreed that general support for activities in the area of European reference networks should be formalised and made visible in the framework of the upcoming health services proposals. However, as the Commission proposals on health services can have significant implications for further work on the ERN, in particular as regards financial and legal issues, the working group decided to wait for the adoption of these proposals before it pursues further work on these aspects of the ERN.

The working group was also consulted on a draft Commission Communication on Public consultation regarding European Action in the Field of Rare Diseases and provided its input into this exercise.

#### **2.4. Health impact assessment and health systems**

In 2006 the Working Group has fulfilled its mandate to deliver a practical Tool for Health Systems Impact Assessment. Therefore the working group did not meet in 2007. A conference during the PT Presidency on 5-6 November 2007 launched the Tool publicly. The Tool will continue to be developed in the coming years.

#### **2.5. Patient safety**

The working group met three times in 2007, in March, September and November. In 2007, a recommendation for consideration by the High Level Group was developed. The recommendation set out all key areas where progress needs to be made and propose concrete actions by the Member States and the Commission and was agreed by all members of the working group. The High Level Group has now signaled their support for the recommendation.

Included in that recommendation is the need to establish an EU patient safety network. Many members of the working group were partners in a proposal submitted in May 2007 under the Public Health Programme for Community funding for a project to set up and manage such a network. Negotiations are ongoing.

Patient safety is expected to be the subject of a key Commission initiative in 2008. Discussions within the working group have taken place on how members can make an important contribution both to the development of the Commission proposal and the related impact assessment work. Members agreed to engage with the Commission in this work.

#### **2.6. Information and e-health**

It was decided in 2006 that the High Level Group will on a regular basis be updated on activities carried out by DG INFSO and its working groups. This shall continue to be the approach taken also in the future.

### **3. ORIENTATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK**

The Commission proposals setting out the framework for safe, high-quality and efficient cross-border healthcare are expected to be presented before the end of 2007. The plenary of the High level Group should therefore meet early in 2008 in order to consider future role of the group within this new framework and to establish its workplan for the future.

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