

**6<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN PATIENTS' RIGHTS DAY**

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**SPEECH**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you to celebrate the 6<sup>th</sup> Patients' Rights Day.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Active Citizenship Network for its important work on empowering patients through raising awareness on patients' rights across Europe.

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50 years ago, healthcare in Europe was very different to what it is today.

Of course – medical breakthroughs, advances in treatments and new technologies have all played a major part in reshaping the European health landscape.

But there is another, perhaps less instantly visible factor which has also changed, and which continues to evolve. And this can be summed up as: "the rise of the patient".

In years gone by, the patient was largely the object of healthcare. Healthcare was given – the patient received. End of story. But all this is gradually changing.

Healthcare is becoming more patient-centred and individualised, with the patient increasingly an active subject and participant in his or her health, rather than a mere recipient of care handed down from above.

The Europe of today, with its progressively ageing population, needs – more than ever – patients to be sufficiently aware and informed to be able to take some health-related decisions on their own initiative.

The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing offers a unique platform to address the challenge of ageing by encouraging and harnessing the potential for innovation in health.

Through the Partnership, we seek to promote the vision of the innovation-enabled citizen as a co-producer of his or her own health.

Our goal is to keep patients out of hospitals – as far as possible.

Innovative solutions, such as personalised guidance systems hold the promise of bringing about significant benefits if they are tailor-made to empower, educate and inform individuals of care and lifestyle choices.

Certainly, older citizens need to play an active role in the Partnership. Its ultimate success largely depends on the involvement of its final users.

We need to find and implement innovative solutions to facilitate active patient involvement. This way, patients stand to benefit from a better and more active life, whilst contributing to reducing the demand on care services.

The Partnership also seeks to change the current, widely-held perception of 'ageing as a burden on society' into 'ageing as a challenge to be turned into a positive opportunity'.

This calls for 'innovation of the mind' – a change in attitude.

It is the capacities and capabilities of older people rather than their limitations that need to be promoted and reinforced.

We need to focus on the valuable contribution that older people can make to society and the economy as a whole.

The Partnership initiative builds on collaboration and synergies amongst different actors and across different policies, beyond national or local boundaries.

It calls on all partners to commit to working together and mobilising efforts to achieve common objectives, always putting patients and citizens at the very centre.

But putting the patients at the heart of healthcare is easy to say but not necessarily so easy to do.

Many official documents state that healthcare should be organised in a "patient centred manner". However, the reality is often different, and has yet to become properly embedded in the daily routine of many healthcare practices.

In a new Qualitative Eurobarometer, [**published today [tbc – CHECK]**], the Commission sought the opinions of healthcare personnel and patients about patient involvement in healthcare.

This revealed that the concept of patient involvement was not clearly understood by either patients or practitioners and often meant different things to different people.

Many patients described a traditional doctor-patient relationship where the doctor was seen to be beyond questioning and the patient felt hesitant to give feedback. The role of the patient was essentially to follow the instructions of the doctor and to follow a healthy lifestyle.

However, patient involvement is more than that.

Good co-operation between doctor and patient can help clinical decision making and could even lead to the more efficient use of resources.

But to achieve this, a slight re-balancing of the role of the doctor and the patient may be needed. This is a big challenge.

In a joint action on patient safety and quality of care, to be launched at the end of this month, Member States will explore and share good practices of patient involvement for safe and high quality healthcare.

The Eurobarometer survey further showed that patients with a chronic disease tended to have more experience in self-monitoring their condition and often had a better relationship with healthcare workers.

Today, we in the European Union are faced with the huge burden of chronic diseases on our healthcare systems, and this, we know, will continue to increase.

It is therefore necessary to explore how to manage chronic diseases in a more efficient way, retaining and enhancing high quality and safety. The role of the patient may be pivotal in this transition.

The Commission and Member States launched a reflection process on how to optimise a response to the chronic disease challenge in Europe.

And Council Conclusions on chronic diseases set out steps towards a coherent approach in addressing chronic diseases at both EU and national level. These identified four important aspects:

First – health promotion and prevention.

Many chronic conditions are preventable, or their onset can be delayed. Policies and actions should focus on risk factors and underlying determinants of chronic diseases such as lifestyle factors as well as underlying social, economic and environmental factors.

Policies and actions should be developed along the full lifecycle. Health promotion and disease prevention should take their rightful place as integral elements of healthcare systems.

### Second – healthcare.

Addressing chronic diseases will require major adjustments in the way health and social systems operate and interact across various fields (including early interventions, secondary prevention, chronic care, new technologies and e-health, care in the community or integration of services in general).

In an informal Council meeting, held by the Danish Presidency three weeks ago, EU health ministers identified developing patient empowerment as a way forward to prepare for health systems of the future; the ageing population; quality of care and financial sustainability.

However, we need to better identify the barriers and advantages of patient empowerment while taking into account cultural and system differences amongst Member States.

### Third – research.

More targeted, applied research on effective prevention, early diagnosis, timely intervention and care models are necessary.

### And finally – we need better information and key data.

Actions and policies must be based on a sound understanding of the prevalence and incidence of chronic diseases and the ways on how best to intervene with preventive and curative measures.

The Commission is willing to play its part in developing suitable and innovative approaches to address the medical, social and economic challenges of chronic diseases.

In this regard we count on the active support of stakeholders.

The input of patient organisations such as the Active Citizenship Network, the Health Policy Forum and other stakeholders will add fuel to discussions with the Member States towards setting up a comprehensive approach on chronic diseases at both national and European level.

In short, only broad and consensual co-operation across all relevant parties in Europe will lead us to a successful strategy to reduce the burden of chronic diseases.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude with a reminder that patient empowerment is a core value of a modern patient-centred health system and a driver to enhance patients' rights.

Empowering patients is a goal of many EU health policies and the European Commission is committed to making progress on this central issue with Member States and stakeholders – patients and health professionals.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you all an enjoyable and inspiring conference.

**End**  
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