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European Health Award 2010 goes to Chronic Disease Alliance

A broad alliance of ten organizations in the area of healthcare is attempting to improve the prevention of chronic diseases at the European level and to furnish decision makers with basic information for appropriate policy measures. For its engagement, the Chronic Disease Alliance was presented today with the European Health Award 2010.

Bad Hofgastein, 8 October 2010 -- Chronic noncommunicable diseases account for 86% of deaths and a substantial amount of morbidity in the WHO European region. With today's granting of the European Health Award 2010, the Chronic Disease Alliance was honoured for its new united prevention approach towards this tremendous public health problem. The Chronic Disease Alliance unites 10 public and professional health organisations active in heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, kidney disease, cancers, respiratory and liver diseases.

The European Health Award is granted annually in connection with the European Health Forum Gastein. The highly endowed prize honours projects and initiatives for the improvement of health care systems in Europe. Important criteria: several countries have to participate in a given project; the project concept has to be transferable to additional countries; and a significant portion of the population must benefit from it.

Cooperative effort for better prevention

The goal of the Chronic Disease Alliance is to influence sustainable health policies in the individual countries in order to effect efficient prevention of chronic noncommunicable diseases. "Winning the European Health Award is a great privilege and we are absolutely thrilled that our initiative has convinced the members of the jury of its merits," said Susanne Løgstrup, Director of the European Heart Network, on behalf of the Chronic Disease Alliance. "Chronic diseases are a major cost and profound economic burden to individuals, their families, health systems and societies."

Most of the chronic conditions addressed by the Alliance are treatable, if not always curable. Four major risk factors – tobacco, poor diet, alcohol, and a lack of physical activity – account for most chronic illness and death in Europe. By providing evidence-based recommendations for population-based policy interventions, the Chronic Disease Alliance aims to achieve health gains across the spectrum of diseases covered by the members.

"The members of the Chronic Disease Alliance have taken up the challenge to place chronic noncommunicable diseases firmly on the agenda of the European Union as well as its 27 individual member states. We must communicate effectively to our political leaders across Europe that unless they take seriously the urgent need to prevent these major diseases, they will face billions in lost national incomes," Sophie O'Kelly, Head of European Affairs for the European Society of Cardiology warned.

To that effect, the Alliance recently published a policy paper, entitled "A Unified Prevention Approach," that identifies central causes of chronic diseases. The paper summarises the current scientific findings of leading professional organizations in respect to noncommunicable diseases. Beyond that, the Alliance also furnishes action proposals on how to proceed in combating the spread of the diseases.

“By acting now on chronic noncommunicable diseases, the European Commission will be doing something that transcends anything else it may accomplish. That will make European citizens healthier and Europe more productive”, said Susanne Løgstrup.

The Alliance represents the following ten European non-profit organizations bringing together more than 100,000 specialists: European Society of Cardiology; European Heart Network; European Society of Hypertension; European Respiratory Society; European Cancer Organisation; European Society of Medical Oncology; European Association of the Study of the Liver; European Kidney Health Alliance; International Diabetes Federation – Europe; Federation of European Nurses in Diabetes.

“This year’s award winning project is an important initiative and impressive because of it’s really united approach,” explained Prof. Dr. Günther Leiner, President of the European Health Forum Gastein and jury member for the European Health Award. “It is a unique development, allowing a great number of important organisations to speak with a single voice, together recommending and supporting the same policy initiatives. The Alliance and its policy paper can have a major impact on the implementation of policies that are required for effective prevention of chronic diseases. Recognizing it with the European Health Award might stir further action.”

Prominent Finalists

The Chronic Disease Alliance thus established itself therewith against a succession of first class competitors nominated for the European Health Award:

- “Healthacross” – Cross-border Health Care Lower Austria-South Bohemia Equal access to care, social adjustment and harmonisation of living conditions in border regions. Participating countries: Austria and the Czech Republic.
- EUnetHTA - Joint action – European Network for Health Technology Assessment. Participating countries: Norway, Switzerland and Croatia.
- Smokefree Class Competition – European school-based smoking prevention programme. Participating countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finnland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Great Britain.
- Life with Parkinson’s Awareness Campaign. Participating countries: France, Germany, Greece, Norway, Rumania, Spain, Slovenia, Slovakia, Turkey and UK.
- The FASE project: Stimulating Alcohol-safe Environments Participating countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Plenary Session: European Health Award: Friday, 8 October 2010.

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