

# **Ministerial Conference on Innovative approaches for chronic illnesses in public health and healthcare systems**

**Brussels, Square, 20 October 2010**

## **Report**

### **Introduction:**

Chronic diseases represent 86 % of mortality in the WHO European Region and have significant economic implications. Chronic diseases require “ongoing management over a period of years or decade and cover a wide range of health problems” (WHO, 2002).

Many of these diseases are preventable and are linked by common risk factors such as tobacco use, overweight and obesity, hypertension, alcohol abuse and sedentary lifestyle. They require coordinated care from a wide range of professionals within a system that promotes patient empowerment.

EU Member States are increasingly facing common challenges with the growing burden of the chronic diseases in the European Union.

The Belgian Presidency of the European Union has decided to draw attention on this crucial issue by organizing a Ministerial Conference on October 20th 2010. This Ministerial Conference aims at bringing the Member States, patients and other relevant stakeholders together to discuss and share experiences and best practices in the field of chronic diseases.

The Belgian Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health, Ms Laurette Onkelinx, hosted the Ministerial Conference where 250 participants, representatives of Member States, the WHO, the European Commission, OECD, patients and other relevant stakeholders debated on the important challenges that chronic diseases pose to both patients and their relatives and to the European society as a whole.

### **Content:**

Chronic diseases affect all age groups and their impact on the daily life of patients and their relatives is enormous. Innovation and solidarity, the central theme of the Belgian Presidency, are key to finding solutions that reduce the inequality in health.

The conference addressed different items:

- The perception of people living with chronic conditions by the society and by patients themselves.
- In the area of prevention: innovative initiatives to improve healthy lifestyles, cost-effective strategies and their implementation, the

importance of collaboration of relevant stakeholders to tackle common risk factors in chronic diseases.

- In the area of care: the role of new technologies to prevent hospital re-admissions and to improve the chronic patient's ability to live independently, the importance of integration of care and multidisciplinary cooperation to ensure optimal support for chronic patients, the importance of increased empowerment of patients and their role in care systems.

The challenges for Europe are obvious: to find innovative ways for cost-effective prevention of common risks factors, such as tobacco, unhealthy diets, alcohol abuse and physical inactivity, to create an environment to 'Make healthy choices easy', to restructure the healthcare systems in order to allow full patient participation and permit a better coordination of care, to stimulate integrated research on early diagnoses, prevention and care for chronic illness.

The European Health Strategy 2008-2013, the EU 2020 and the current and future European research programs should contribute to this.

Minister Onkelinx said: "It is time that chronic diseases are discussed at the European level. This conference has initiated a profound reflection integrating all chronic diseases, and will be the start for further action."

The conclusions of the Ministerial conference will be presented at the December Council of the Ministers of Health.

### **Conclusions:**

- Ministerial conference: pavement to the Council conclusions in December 2010. ESMO should follow up with the Belgian authorities (Ministry of Health, Cabinet of Minister of Health). European initiatives are the results of a sometimes long and complex dynamic where each actor contributes (private initiatives like CDA, European Parliament...).
- ESMO is part of the CDA generating a serious interest of the European Parliament. A joint meeting of the European Parliament discussion groups and intergroups on chronic diseases in Europe took place in Brussels (5 October) and a statement adopted at the end of the meeting shall be sent to the Presidency of the EU. ECCO and ESMO in the framework of the CDA are working together with other partners on this important and unprecedented joint meeting of the Parliament and its consequences. CDA initiative was presented by Prof. K. Andersen ( Cardiology).