

Task Force on migrant-friendly hospitals



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BACKGROUND DOCUMENT



October 2004



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HPH TASK FORCE ON THE MIGRANT-FRIENDLY HOSPITAL*

We live today in a multiethnic society, cohabited by groups of people with experience, language and culture not necessarily shared by those outside their own group. As the diversity of cultures and languages increases in every country, health care systems are faced with the challenge of providing accessible and quality services that are responsive to the needs of a growing multicultural population. This challenge is particularly felt today by hospitals as they often represent the first point of access to health care for migrants and members of minority ethnic communities and other disadvantaged groups. Yet, at the same time, hospitals have the opportunity to strengthen their role in health promotion and to improve the overall quality of services for migrant and minorities ethnic groups, as is being demonstrated by the European Migrant-friendly Hospital project.

Specific analyses state that migrant patients and members of minority ethnic communities and other disadvantaged groups tend to receive lower levels of health care compared to indigenous patients due to the lack of awareness of services available, provision of appropriate access to services and the negative attitude of staff in the delivery of health services. The European project shows how inequalities in health and in accessing health care and services can be redressed by creating “migrant-friendly and health care services sensitive to differences (culturally competent)” which overcome the (linguistic and cultural) barriers to the access and delivery of appropriate hospital activities and empower people of diverse backgrounds to actively participate in the organization and provision of their health care. The issues of responding

* The TF was presented at the HPH international conference last may in Moscow with the title „TF on Migrant-friendly Hospital“. A proposal for a new name will be discussed at the next TF meeting.



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appropriately and equitably to diverse communities are ones that have plagued many service providers. However, the MfH project has demonstrated that there is a genuine commitment on behalf of healthcare providers across Europe developing policies, procedures and practices for culturally competent healthcare.

The MfH project (www.mfh-eu.net) in its general features, may be well known in the HPH community, however many might be unaware of the wealth – both in quantity and in quality – of the material produced at a European as well as local level. This wealth of knowledge and experiences needs now to be fully exploited, disseminated and further developed beyond the termination of the project in March 2005. It is important that this experience is sustained for current members and extended to the whole HPH network and to the new European member states, and, who knows, perhaps beyond. By the same token it is important to continue to develop knowledge, competences and models of good practice in the promotion of health and tackling of health inequalities of migrants, minority ethnic communities and other disadvantaged groups.

Taking all this into account, the Emilia-Romagna Network of HPH proposed the implementation of a Task Force on Migrant-friendly Hospitals at the 10th WHO Workshop for the Coordinators of the National / Regional Networks of HPH which took place in Moscow on 26th May 2004. The proposal was welcomed by the WHO European Office for Integrated Health Care Services, ensured the scientific support of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute in Vienna, and received wide interest at a specific thematic session organised during the 12th International HPH Conference in Moscow.

Why a task force on migrant-friendly hospitals?

The idea of creating a new HPH Task Force stems from the need to continue work after the termination of the EU project on MFH, and to build on its



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experiences, in order to better disseminate project outputs and recommendations, to stimulate new collaborations and ideas around this important issue for hospitals, and to create the base for the development of future common activities and projects to submit to the European Commission. The TF intends to bring together practitioners, managers, scientists and community representatives with specific expertise and competence and an “authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge” in the field. In this sense it will act as an “epistemic community” aiming at sustaining the development and implementation of policies and services, research activities and practices addressing inequalities in healthcare at a local, national and European level. In particular, the Task Force will become a resource for the overall HPH network by:

- Addressing ethno-cultural diversity in health care;
- Continuing to strengthen the focus on diversity with a HPH approach; thus reinforcing the role of hospitals in health promotion for migrants, members of minority ethnic communities and other disadvantaged groups;
- Acting as an interface between health promotion activities on ethno-cultural diversity and HPH national and regional networks, both in the phase of developing new projects and in the phase of exploiting projects already in place, thus contributing to the development of specific knowledge, competences and models of good practice;
- Promoting good health through sharing of good policies and practices;
- Providing a means to foster cooperation and alliances between internal and external networks and to attract new member hospitals, thus encouraging growth of the overall HPH movement.

The aims of the task force on migrant-friendly hospitals

- To support member organisations in developing policies, systems and competences for the provision and delivery of accessible health care to patients from diverse communities;



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- To contribute to the development of research activities and projects on specific areas of concern, aimed at creating healthcare services that are sensitive to differences;
- To inform and involve TF participants in projects tackling the issue of diversity in health care;
- To act as a ‘think tank’ for addressing health inequalities related to socio-ethno-cultural differences at a local, national and international level;
- To disseminate good practice, for example MfH project outcomes and materials (translations, reviews, reports, ...);
- To create a framework for continuity, developing culturally competent healthcare and institutions beyond the conclusion of the current MfH project (03/2005);
- To promote continued visibility for the concerns of ethnic and social inequalities in health care in conferences at a local, national and international level.

Participation

Participants will receive information on all ongoing activities, be actively involved in specific projects and gain visibility for coming EU project proposals.

Participation is open to:

- Regional and national HPH networks,
- Hospital and healthcare service representatives,
- Existing healthcare institutions participating in the MfH project,
- Community and patient representatives,
- NGOs,
- Research bodies.

A number of healthcare organisations, research institutions and social organisations have already expressed their interest in joining the TF. (a list of provisional participants is enclosed).



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