

## Editorial

### A fond farewell from Secretary General, Maya Parikh

As many of you know, Health First Europe (HFE) was officially launched in March 2004. Since its inception, four years ago, I have been lucky enough to be involved in this exciting and challenging alliance. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction when I look back at all that HFE has undertaken in its first four years of existence and to see just how much we have jointly achieved.

Just to mention a few HFE campaigns, HFE launched in February 2006 its first major publication "2050 – A health Odyssey: thought provoking ideas for policy-making". Comprised of articles drafted by the HFE members and the then current Austrian EU Presidency, this publication considered what healthcare would be like in Europe in 2050, and the steps required to attain these ideals. Launched by HFE Patron, and former Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner, David Byrne the book has since by distributed to more than 2000 healthcare decision-makers and many more copies have been downloaded from the HFE website.

More recently, in March 2007, the "HFE health survey 2007" was published, encapsulating the personal perspectives of key EU decision-makers and healthcare stakeholders on the pressing healthcare policy issues of the day and strategies for moving forward. The survey report revealed a number of interesting findings, including that 41% of all respondents favour the long term objective of having a unique European healthcare system common to all states with a few specific rules to meet local needs. This high figure would have been inconceivable just ten years previously at the time of signing of the Amsterdam Treaty.

These are but a few of the major achievements that HFE has realised over the last 4 years, I am pleased to say that there are simply too many to discuss here! Through our combined efforts, HFE has earned its position as a respected and acknowledged healthcare player on the EU health policy scene in Brussels. The alliance has grown both in size and stature to its current 25 organisational members, 12 individual members and its activities and messages are supported by 25 prominent MEPs.

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While I am personally very sorry to be moving on from HFE, and will miss working closely with all the members on our important issues, I am certain that with the solid basis HFE has, it will continue to move forward from strength to strength. I wish HFE and its members' success in the future and hope to see you from time to time at HFE events!

**Maya Parikh**  
Secretary General of HFE

### Health First Europe presents its activities to UEHP members

HFE presented its past and future activities at the Annual General Meeting of one of its members, the European Federation of Private Hospitals (UEHP). UEHP's national members expressed their enthusiasm concerning HFE's projects and renewed their support to our organisation.

### Hungarian Parliament in Budapest



### Health First Europe participates in the 3rd Global Patients Congress in Budapest

From 20 to 22 February, Health First Europe participated in the 3rd Global Patients Congress in Budapest, running an information stand and taking part in the fruitful debates. The Congress organised by the International Alliance of Patient's Organisations gathered almost 200 health stakeholders (patients' organisations, policy-makers and industry representatives).

Key note addresses demonstrated the central role that patients are increasingly playing in healthcare today. Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer, England and Chair of the WHO World Alliance for Patients Safety, Ms Katalin Rapi, Secretary of State for Health Policy at the Ministry of Health, Hungary and Mr. Andrzej Ryś, Director, Public Health & Risk Assessment at the European Commission, DG SANCO, all highlighted the importance of developing collaboration between patients and all other healthcare stakeholders. HFE discussed with the participants the need for patient-centred healthcare and presented its past and future activities.

### MEP Georgs Andrejevs brings his support to Health First Europe

HFE is pleased to announce that MEP Georgs Andrejevs (ALDE, Latvia) has decided to become a supporter of Health First Europe. Andrejevs is a Member of the Bureau of the ALDE group and sits on the European Parliament's Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. He is a doctor/anesthesiologist by training and has been the Latvian Foreign Minister from 1992 to 1994 as well as Latvia's ambassador to the Council of Europe from 1998 to 2004. Georgs Andrejevs is a Member of the European Parliament since 2004. HFE welcomes his support and looks forward to working with him in the future.



MEP Georgs Andrejevs

## HFE Member News

The European Federation of Public Services Employees held an event in the Committee of the Regions on the future of the health sector. A hundred participants were present to discuss with 12 high profile speakers. The emphasis was put on challenges and conditions of healthcare professionals.

*For more information, please click [here](#).*

**On 15 January, the European Parliament adopted the “Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work” with an amendment about healthcare associated infections.**

In its Plenary session on 15 January the European Parliament adopted the “Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work” Glenis Willmott’s report (PES, UK) has been adopted by 598 votes to 20 and 23 abstentions. Although the majority of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) described the well-balanced report as “excellent” and welcomed the ambitious targets that the Commission has set itself to reduce work-related accidents in the EU by 25% on average, the Commission was also criticised for being silent on targets for the reduction of occupational diseases. An amendment by Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE, UK) called for the adoption of a “European code of best practice on infection contracted in health services”. Liz Lynne drew attention to the fact that situations differ greatly between the different Member States. The United Kingdom, for example, records ten times more work-related illnesses than the Netherlands. Liz Lynne MEP had already taken this position at the HFE event on Healthcare Associated Infections (HCAI) in October 2007.

**A ruling of the European Court of Justice on 31 January extended the protection of disabled persons against discrimination also to persons who care for them.**

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) published on 31 January the opinion of one of its Attorney Generals about a case of “discrimination by association”. A mother sued her former employee because she was dismissed for excessive absenteeism brought about as a result of having to care for her disabled son. The ECJ opinion judged that this was a case of discrimination by association and hereby extended the special protection rights of disabled persons also to people who care for them. The complete court will discuss the case in May. In around 80 per cent of all cases the complete court upholds the opinion of its Attorney Generals.  
*For more information, please click [here](#).*

**At three events in February EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou and MEPs call for increased prevention, screening and diagnostics measures to combat cancer in the European Union in a more effective way.**

In February several events and actions at the European level highlighted the fight against cancer, one of the health priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, namely: a European Parliament resolution, the Slovenian EU Conference and a “MEPs against cancer” event.

- The European Parliament’s Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted on 30 January a resolution on “Combating cancer in the enlarged EU”. It calls on the European Commission to set up an institutionalised EU Cancer Task Force composed of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament to meet on a regular basis, to collect and exchange best practices and to provide leadership for improved cancer control in Europe.

*For the Parliament’s resolution, please click [here](#).*

- At a conference organised by the Slovenian Presidency on 7 and 8 February, Commissioner Kyprianou called for more prevention efforts in the fight against cancer and more effective programmes for screening and early detection. He promised that this issue will remain on the agenda of the European Commission.

*For the speech of Commissioner Kyprianou, please click [here](#).*

- Finally, a meeting organised by “MEPs against cancer” on 13 February brought together several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other interested stakeholders. The MEPs called for increased screening efforts and discussed the improvements since the adoption of the screening recommendation of the European Council in 2003. They came to the conclusion that population based screening programmes are the most effective preparation methods in the fight against cancer and have to be continued and increased.

*For the press release about the “MEPs against cancer” workshop, please click [here](#).*

## **The European Commission launches a public consultation on patient safety.**

The European Commission, DG Health and Consumer Protection, on 25 March launched an eight week public consultation process on patient safety and announced an upcoming proposal at the end of the year. The proposal will include a detailed first pillar addressing healthcare associated infections (HCAI) and tackle two main objectives:

- The availability of redress opportunities and sufficient and comprehensive information should improve EU citizens' confidence in EU health systems, including in healthcare providers in their own country and in other Member States

- The support of Member States in their efforts to minimise harm to patients from adverse events in their health systems, through appropriate policies and actions to improve safety and, therefore, quality of care. Contributions to the consultation process are possible by filling out an online questionnaire by 20 May 2008.

*For more information, please click [here](#).*

## **Designated Health Commissioner Androula Vassiliou announces Directive on cross-border healthcare for June.**

On 1 April, European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety questioned the designated Commissioner for Health, Androula Vassiliou, about her qualifications and plans for her new job as Health Commissioner.



**Health  
Commissioner  
Androula Vassiliou**

**Commission President  
José Manuel Barroso**

At the hearing, Vassiliou announced the EU Directive for cross-border healthcare for June and reassured the MEPs that it was not her intention to damage existing health systems in the Member States. She is currently working on the proposal in order to clarify the decisions made by the ECJ. The focus of the directive will lie on patients' rights and increased access to healthcare.

Furthermore, Márkos Kyprianoú's successor explained her intention for the Directive on organ transplantations to introduce some common standards but that these measures should not lead to excessive bureaucracy. Regarding cancer screening, she announced that the Commission will review the results of the current programmes and possibly expand the current Directive to include other types of cancer that require early screening. Finally, the new Commissioner will put emphasis on mental health and confirmed the upcoming initiatives on patient safety and rare diseases.

## **Calendar of upcoming Events**

**06 - 08/05/2008** - The Slovenian Presidency is organising a conference titled "eHealth without frontiers" in Portoroz, Slovenia. *For more information, please click [here](#).*

**06/05/2008** - The White Paper on a Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity related health issues is scheduled to be adopted by the European Parliament's ENVI committee. It will then be discussed in the Council on 09 June before being adopted in Plenary on 16 June 2008.

**13/06/2008** - The European Commission is holding a high-level conference on "Mental health" in Brussels. *For more information, please click [here](#).*

**For more information, please visit [www.healthfirsteurope.org](http://www.healthfirsteurope.org)**