



European
Patients' Rights
& Cross-Border
Healthcare

Member of the European Parliament Interest Group



Towards the establishment of the MEPs Interest Group “European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare”

*Civic societies and patient organizations together with the Members of the EU Parliament
to strengthen the protection of patients' rights in the European framework*

Presentation

The idea to encourage a MEPs informal Interest Group focused on patients' rights follows the widespread request to the EU Parliament of more than 80 civic and patient organizations¹ to recognize officially the value of citizens' initiatives, such as the European Charter of Patients' Rights² and the European Patients' Rights Day³.

The request has been launched during the IX Edition of the European Patients' Rights Day and it is included in the “Report on safer healthcare in Europe: improving patient safety and fighting antimicrobial resistance (2014/2207(INI))”, approved unanimously on April 2015 by the ENVI Committee first, and then in plenary by the European Parliament in May 2015.

Why the MEPs Interest Group “European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare”?

1. The recognition of Patients' Rights across the European Union is due to an increasing demand from European citizens and the reinforcement of these rights will become effective only with the cooperation and commitment of all the stakeholders in each EU country.

Over the years, the EU Commission⁴, as well as the civic and patient organizations⁵, developed several European assessments in order to produce information on the actual implementation of patients' rights at EU level. In general, the level of awareness regarding the 14 rights mentioned in the European Charter of Patients' Rights is generally unacceptable. The negative evaluation was also confirmed with the 2014⁶ assessment regarding the “Right to avoid unnecessary suffering and pain”, whose aim was to bring to the attention the condition of patients suffering with chronic diseases and chronic pain. These negative results send a precise signal to the civic society and to the European Institutions about the work that still needs to be done: it is a difficult challenge which needs to be faced as a joint effort.

¹ <http://www.activecitizenship.net/primo-piano/173-support-the-european-patients-rights-day.html>

² http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/co_operation/mobility/docs/health_services_co108_en.pdf

³ http://ec.europa.eu/health/patient_safety/docs/2015_eu_patients_factsheet_en.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/health/cross_border_care/key_documents/index_en.htm

⁵ www.activecitizenship.net/files/patients_rights/civic_assessment/european_patients_rights_day_report_light.pdf
www.activecitizenship.net/images/patientsrights/abstract_eu_charter_patient_rights_civ_ass.pdf

⁶ www.activecitizenship.net/patients-rights/109-pain-report-on-respect-of-patients-rights-among-the-europe.html

2. The sustainability of healthcare systems across Europe is a common good to be safeguarded and, therefore, a common challenge for different key actors: Institutions at EU and national level, professionals, companies, providers, citizens and patients.

The civic and patient organizations, as well as the MEPs, are concerned about how to reach this goal. Not involving citizens, patients and their associations, will mean that patients' needs, rights and their protection will not be taken into consideration. Or that they will be just stated in law and affirmed in theory but not in practice. It is acknowledged the direct impact of the economic crisis on the access to healthcare, especially for the vulnerable people, which are exposed to social exclusion and to increased private costs that often bring them to give up medical care. Faced with this scenario, the MEPs Interest Group "European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare" will represent an effective message of the commitment of the European Institutions and that they are aware that any action towards a sustainable healthcare system should be done by putting patients' rights at the forefront.

3. It is necessary to mobilize all efforts to build an enabling environment for citizens and patient organizations in the European health policy.

To increase the cooperation among the EU Institutions and citizens and patient organizations, this Interest Group will provide a civic perspective, putting and recognizing the citizens at the center of health policies, not only as "users or consumers" of health services or "patients" with a specific disease, but rather as active citizens participating in healthcare policymaking as essential stakeholders concerned with the sustainability, safety and quality of healthcare.

4. Strengthening the European citizenship, putting in practice the benefits that the EU offers to patients.

In order to overcome the economic and political crisis and avoid a drift which might turn the dream of a united Europe into a nightmare, it is necessary that all the stakeholders undertake initiatives toward a higher degree of social justice, development and promotion of an active citizenship, also guaranteeing adequate levels of rights protection. To reach the final goal of a European citizenship, a common platform of rights is needed, in which all citizens can recognize themselves and engage with a wider civic participation. For the European Parliament, these commitments can be a clear message to the European citizens and patients that the European Institutions are closer to their needs and ready to protect their rights.

Some key issues that the Interest Group will address:

1. Making it official, institutionalize and promote the European Patients' Rights Day within the European Parliament.
2. Actively support the celebrations of the European Patients' Rights Day and collaborate with civic and patient associations at the national and European level.
3. Strengthen the protection of patients' rights in the European legislation, starting from the adoption of the European Charter of Patients' Rights, that aims to guarantee a "high level of human health protection" (Article 35 of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union) and to ensure the high quality of services provided by the various national health services in Europe.
4. Establish the European Year of Patients' Rights during its mandate.

- Promote initiatives that encourage the EU Member States to respect the primary and secondary European legislation and the recommendations focused on patients' safety and the protection of their rights. It could be done with the involvement of civic and patient associations, starting from the Directive 2011/24/EU on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare and the most recent "Report on safer healthcare in Europe: improving patient safety and fighting antimicrobial resistance (2014/2207(INI))", approved by the EU Parliament. A document in which is recommended to "actively and formally involve patients' organizations" and promote information campaigns, in order to guarantee patients rights such as the right to information, to free choice, to safety, to innovation, to complain and to compensation. In this document the EU Parliament underlines that treatment should center on patients and that health services should not be subjected to unwarranted cuts ostensibly dictated by austerity. For these reasons, MEPs invite the Commission and the Member States to support the European Patients' Rights Day at local, national and EU level.

The European Parliament has the opportunity to play an active role to improve the protection of patients' rights in the European framework, also thanks to the help and efforts of the MEPs Interest Group "European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare".

Support and secretariat

The Italian Members of the European Parliament David Borrelli, Co-Chair of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group, and Gianni Pittella, Chair of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, are the first MEPS that have decided to support the new Interest Group on European Patients' Rights and Cross-Border Healthcare, having officially pointed out, during the IX Edition of the European Patients' Rights Day, that patients' rights, as stated in the Charter of Patients' Rights, are non-negotiable and universal values that must be guaranteed to all the European citizens.

The Secretariat will be provided by the representative office to the EU of Active Citizenship Network, a platform of more than 100 civic and patient organizations deeply involved in the field of patients' rights and promoter of the European Charter of Patients' Rights in 2002 and the European Patients' Rights Day since 2007.

For further information:

www.interestgroup.activecitizenship.net

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