



MEPs Interest Group on “European Patients' Rights and Cross-Border Healthcare”

LAUNCH EVENT

**December 2nd 2015, room ASP A7H1, 10:00-12:00
European Parliament, Brussels**

Introduction

**By Mariano Votta
Director Active Citizenship Network**

Dear Members of the European Parliament, Institutions, relevant stakeholders, colleagues, friends
Good morning and welcome!

Being here in Brussels, today, is not a secondary issue, to be taken for granted.
We perfectly understand those who confirmed their attendance and changed their mind afterwards.

That is why I would like to thank you twice, for being here, but, above all, for having embraced the message coming out from this meeting, which goes beyond the initiative we are about to introduce: there is a civil society who does not stop ; it is made of professionals, representatives of Public Institutions, citizens who are not afraid of going on; as I said, we have embraced the protection of citizens' rights and, therefore, we simply do not make any exception to this commitment. Rhetoric aside, thank you very much indeed and congratulations!

Well, today we are proud to present an initiative we have been working on with utmost dedication and joint efforts.

We have to thank, first of all, 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. They are the first MEPs that have decided to support the new Interest Group, having officially pointed out, last May during the IX Edition of the European Patients' Rights Day, that patients' rights are non-negotiable and universal values that must be guaranteed to all the European citizens. And of course, thanks to all the MEPs that have accepted to support the Interest Group. Civic society, patient organizations, Members of the EU Parliament work all together to strengthen the protection of patients' rights in the European framework.

This is the message and the main goal of this initiative.

To those who wonder why the launch of this Interest Group, we may answer, why only now? Indeed, the rise of the Interest Group goes in the exact direction of the latest decisions of the European Commission, who has recently introduced the right of cross-border healthcare. It is absolutely in accordance with more than ten years of commitment of Active Citizenship Network at European level, which first led us to the drafting of the European Charter of Patients' Rights in 2002 and, later, to the celebration of the European Patients' Rights Day, which has become a permanent event in the European agenda since 2007 and has involved tens of civic and patients' associations, receiving also the support of several stakeholders and local, national, European Institutions.

Actually, there is a variety of reasons who encouraged us to found this Interest Group.

“Patient centricity” and “health in all policies” are two major drivers of actions and programs promoted by European Institutions on health issues. We convey these ideas into acknowledgement and respect of patients' rights: “Patients’

rights centrality” and “patients’ rights in all health policies”. Citizens suffering from different diseases have the same rights to be informed, to promptly access to the most appropriate care, to freedom of choice, to avoid unnecessary pain, to innovation in favour of patients, etc. Thus, over the years we have been carrying out lots of activities with the purpose of describing, on one hand, the level of interest of Institutions and stakeholder on the topic and, on the other hand, the level of information and awareness of citizens and patients in relation to their rights. The answer is that we are still far from a satisfactory situation, in terms of both formal acceptance and recognition of patients’ rights by national and European laws and effective respect and exercise of these rights.

The Interest Group aims at drawing and maintaining the highest level of attention on the topic, also because we are pretty sure that strengthen protection of rights all over Europe may consequently contribute to reinforce a sense of belonging to a European citizenship we desperately need to build.

At the same time, it is necessary to mobilize all efforts to build an enabling environment for citizens and patient organizations in the European health policy. In particular, we believe that any action intended to facilitate collaboration and sharing of information and Know-how as well as mutual communication – among national associations, European networks and MEPs in this case – is definitely an asset.

As many of you already know, the idea of encouraging a MEPs Interest Group focused on patients’ rights is connected to a widespread request of 100 civic and patient organizations sent to the EU Parliament to officially recognize the importance of citizens’ initiatives in health policy-making, as for the European Charter of Patients’ Rights and the European Patients’ Rights Day. The request has been launched on May 12th 2015 during the IX Edition of the European Patients’ Rights Day, and is included in the “Report on safer healthcare in Europe: improving patient safety and fighting antimicrobial resistance (2014/2207(INI))”, approved by the European Parliament on May 19th 2015. In this Report, the EU Parliament “recognizes the value of citizens’ initiatives, such as the European Charter of Patients’ Rights based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the European Patients’ Rights Day, which has been organised every year on 18th April since 2007; invites the Commission and the Member States to support the European Patients’ Rights Day at local, national and EU level”.

Main aims of the Interest Group

Let me say that the Interest Group aims to be an “open space”, where different topics related to patients’ conditions can get the appropriate attention of EU Institutions and a “Patient-Centred Care” perspective, with the contribution of all the relevant stakeholders.

Today, it is also the first occasion to collect your proposals for the next meetings that will be organized accordingly. Our idea is to promote initiatives focused on each of the 14 Patient’ Rights established in the EU Charter of Patients’ Rights, also taking into account what is scheduled for the next Semesters of Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Now we are ready to start talking about the new patients’ right introduced by the Cross-border Directive, which is the patients’ right to go abroad for care.

With the EU Directive 2011/24/EU on the application of patients’ rights to cross-border healthcare, for the first time the “patients’ rights” are mentioned in the title and so explicitly included in a EU legal context; moreover, two rights stated in the European Charter of Patients' Rights, the “right to free choice” and the “right to information”, are officially recognized.

We believe that the concrete implementation of this Directive could testify the real commitment of our Governments at national level in the framework of patients' rights: for this reason the implementation of the Directive is so relevant for us.

So, from our perspective, the main aims of the Interest Group are:

- To strengthen the protection of patients’ rights in the European legislation, starting from the adoption of those included in the European Charter of Patients' Rights, that was already an essential milestone for the drafting of other Charters (e.g. the European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights and the European Charter of the Rights of Citizens over 65 with Chronic Pain in 2014).
- To promote initiatives to encourage and ensure the appropriate implementation and respect of the European legislation focused on patients’ safety and the protection of their rights in the EU countries, starting from the Directive 2011/24/EU on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare.
- To actively support the celebrations of the European Patients’ Rights Day and collaborate with civic and patient associations at national and European level.
- Make the European Parliament acknowledge the European Patients' Rights Day in order to officially recognize and institutionalize it. Establish a European Year of Patients' Rights.

We believe that 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 and Cross-Border Healthcare”. Thanks again for your support!

Last but not least, please let me remember that the Secretariat of the Interest Group is guaranteed by the representative office to the EU of my organization, that I would like to thank you a lot for the great effort and dedication. Therefore, thanks to Bianca and Claudia and of course to all ACN staff, Daniela, Elisa and Sonia.