

DG SANCO
Open consultation on Patient Safety

Hollola, Finland, 15 May 2008

IVAA's response to DG SANCO *Open consultation on Patient Safety*
(Supplement to IVAA's response to the electronic questionnaire)

The International Federation of Anthroposophic Medical Associations (IVAA) appreciates that the EU Commission, DG SANCO, takes up the issue of patient safety as a major challenge for the health systems in the EU member-states and their medical and clinical management in health facilities. Experiences in a number of EU member states and beyond underline the urgent necessity for action to improve the safety and quality of the healthcare systems for patients. IVAA welcomes the initiative of the EU Commission in a sector of healthcare, where the necessity for transparency and openmindedness collide with the attitude of healthcare organizations to minimize adverse effects of patient treatment.

IVAA is aware that the question of patient safety remains in principal an issue resting with the health systems in the member-states. Due to the limited legal basis for EU institutions to act in this field, EU initiatives, as far as technical improvements are concerned, can only raise awareness by better and up-to date information, by inviting stakeholders to come forward with suggestions and solutions as well as disseminating examples of best practice.

In this context IVAA points to a number of initiatives in Germany, United Kingdom or Switzerland, just to name a few, which are concerned about the high percentage of safety incidents or adverse events in our complex healthcare settings¹. Amongst others these initiatives have developed a comprehensive array of technical and medical management actions to fight adverse events and to increase patient safety. These measures include:

- Patient safety as a compulsory subject in health professional training
- Establishment of training centers for patient safety for in-job training of health professionals
- Introduction of special patient-medication info-systems (Barcode systems for the medication of patients)
- Development of better guidance-systems in case of surgical interventions
- Establishment of internal error reporting- and correction systems in healthcare settings

¹Aktionsbündnis Patientensicherheit e.V (Germany), The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence NICE (United Kingdom), Stiftung für Patientensicherheit (Switzerland)

Medical organizations, active in this field, will provide the necessary insights into the operation, practicability, advantages and implementation-problems of these measures. IVAA strongly supports all these actions, which contribute to raise patient safety, as long as they do not infringe the freedom of choice of treatment and guarantee the possibility for individual treatment and the necessary confidentiality required in each individual case.

Furthermore, IVAA is convinced that the EU institutions have a number of responsibilities and possibilities to improve the general environment of patient safety. As a medical association IVAA would like to draw the attention especially to the question of medication in regard to patient safety. The decision about what kind of treatment a patient will have, has considerable influence on the safety of medical treatment.

The health systems in the European Union are changing. For various reasons patients demand a much more active role in the process of their healthcare and in the decision making about their treatments. In addition patients demand the freedom of choice between alternative medical treatments. This new approach of citizens and patients to their health has to be activated.

Healthcare systems must change accordingly, and there is a need to provide patients with the possibility of a genuine “freedom of choice” in treatment. This is primarily a question of interaction between health professionals and patients and of comprehensive information to patients about all therapeutic options available, including integrated and complementary alternatives.

In this respect patients have to be mobilized to contribute to cure themselves. It has been shown that changes of life-style can contribute to self-healing and reduce the need for medication, which always include a potential of adverse effect ^{2,3}).

Complementary and integrative methods (CAM) have to be included into the information given to the patients about the range of treatments available. CAM treatments often can offer good alternatives especially for less severe and for chronic diseases, as they usually have less adverse effects and by this, contribute directly to patient safety.

² Brombach C, Wagner U, Eisinger-Watzl M, Heyer A: Die Nationale Verzehrstudie II. Ernährungs-Umschau 2006; 53(1):4-9.

³ Alm JS, Swartz J, Lilja G, Scheynius A, Pershagen G: Atopy in children of families with an anthroposophic lifestyle. Lancet. 1999 May 1;353(9163):1485-8.

Take the example of resistance against antibiotics: Resistance against antibiotics is by now a European wide problem and developed into great-risks factor for the safety of seriously ill patients. As one of the causal factors for the development of this newly risks can be regarded the unlimited and criticless use of antibiotics for banal diseases. On the one side this is due to the lack of information and skills of health professionals concerning complementary/alternative ways of treatment and on the other side to the tendency of overprotection by European and/or national regulations hampering the availability of complementary, i.e. homeopathic and anthroposophic medicinal products on the market.

Instead of focusing exclusively on supranational controlling systems, EU Commission should also similarly foster health systems in the member-states to open up real possibilities for the patients to have the freedom of choice with regard to alternative ways of treatment and the use of complementary/alternative medicinal products. In this respect, the implementation of training facilities and the provision of adequate and competent information concerning methods of complementary/alternative medicine (CAM) for both, health professionals and civil servants in National Agencies would contribute most significantly to improve patient safety in Europe.

About IVAA

The IVAA (International Federation of Anthroposophic Medical Associations) represents and coordinates the National Anthroposophic Doctors' Associations with regard to political and legal affairs on both, European and international levels.

---Anthroposophic medicine has developed remarkably in Europe from its inception in 1920 to the present day and is increasingly recognized in the general public and in the academic world.

---Anthroposophic medicinal products are prescribed by approximately 30,000 doctors in 18 of the 27 EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Eire, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom), in Norway, in Switzerland, and in 65 countries worldwide.

---Anthroposophic medicine is officially recognized within distinct limits in Austria, Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

---Anthroposophic medicine is practised in hospitals and other in-patient facilities in Austria, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK, including teaching hospitals and other hospitals of public health care.

---Anthroposophic medicine is taught at universities in Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.

For the Executive Council of IVAA



Dr Peter Zimmerman

President:	Peter Zimmermann, M.D., Ph.D., Vellamontie 4, FIN – 15870 Hollola
Vicepresident and Treasurer:	Georg Soldner, Paediatrician, Josef Retzer Str. 36, D – 81241 München
Secretary:	Andreas Arendt, M.D., Kasernenstr. 23, CH – 4410 Liestal
Council:	Michaela Glöckler, M.D., Medizinische Sektion / Goetheanum, CH – 4143 Dornach Frank Mulder, G.P., Heliös Medical Centre, 17 Stoke Hill, GB – Bristol BS9 1JN Madeleen Winkler, G.P., Krugerlaan 79, NL – 2806 EC Gouda
EU Liaison-Office:	Rue du Trône 194, B – 1050 Bruxelles, Phone: +32 2 64 00 20, E-mail: g.schulz@ivaa.info
Accounting-Office:	Gesellschaft Anthroposophischer Ärzte in Deutschland, Roggenstr. 82, D – 70794 Filderstadt Phone: +49 711 7799711, Fax: +49 711 7799712, E-mail: contact@ivaa.info, Homepage: www.ivaa.info