



Health MEPs propose blueprint for safer healthcare

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Suggested measures to improve patient safety, inter alia by tackling growing resistance to human and veterinary antibiotics by using existing treatments more responsibly and promoting innovation, are set out in a Health Committee resolution voted on Tuesday. MEPs note that between 8 and 12% of patients admitted to hospitals in the EU suffer adverse events such as healthcare-related infections, which place a heavy burden on limited health service budgets.

"It's a very important result which will provide a quantum leap in European healthcare and help preventing a major death toll" said lead MEP Piernicola Pedicini (EFDD, IT), whose recommendations were unanimously approved by the Health committee. "I am very pleased for the result and the collaboration with the colleagues. I am still wondering why such a relevant issue, despite authoritative international researchers' predictions, is still so underestimated by national governments and almost ignored by citizens" he added.

The measures that MEPs propose to ensure that antibiotics are used more responsibly include strictly prohibiting their use without prescription, implementing marketing practices designed to prevent conflicts of interest between producers and prescribers, and better information, monitoring and infection control. Noting that resistance to certain commonly used antibiotics is encountered in at least 25% of cases in several member states, MEPs also urge pharmaceutical companies to invest in developing new antimicrobial agents.

Use of antimicrobials in the veterinary sector

MEPs also advocate responsible use of antimicrobials in veterinary medicine, including medicated feed, by allowing their use only for treatment after veterinary diagnosis. Two pieces of legislation on the matter are under discussion in the European Parliament.

The use of veterinary antibiotics should therefore gradually be restricted to therapeutic purposes, by progressively eliminating their use for prophylactic ones. Metaphylaxis, i.e. the mass medication of animals to cure sick ones on farms whilst preventing the infection of healthy ones, should also be minimised, say MEPs.

Economic crisis

MEPs note that the current economic crisis has placed increased pressure on national healthcare budgets, and hence has an impact on patient safety. They call on member states to make sure that healthcare systems are not affected by austerity measures and remain adequately funded.

Next steps

The report is to be put to a vote by the full House in May.

Background

Between 8 % and 12 % of patients admitted to hospitals in the EU suffer from adverse events while receiving healthcare and nearly half of these events could be avoided. The most common healthcare-related adverse events are healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), medication-related events and complications arising during or after surgical operations.

Press release

HAIs are a major public health problem in EU member states. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 1 in 20 hospital in-patients, on average, suffers from an HAI in the EU, that is to say, 4.1 million patients annually, and every year 37,000 people in the EU die as a result of an HAI, even though 20%-30% of these infections are considered to be preventable by intensive hygiene and control programmes.

Further Information

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