

WRITTEN QUESTION E-4745/08
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to the Commission

Subject: Information for patients: the Cochrane initiative

A recent study in The Lancet Oncology highlighted differences in cancer survival rates from one country to another worldwide. Inequalities and differing survival rates for different kinds of cancer also exist between countries within the European Union. The chance of a woman surviving for 5 years after contracting breast cancer, for example, is 82% in Sweden, 69.6% in Ireland and 57.9% in Slovakia. For the Netherlands the figure is 77.6%. Survival rates for bowel cancer also vary, from 28.5% in Poland to 57% in Spain and 52.7% in the Netherlands (men). The differences in survival rates for prostate cancer are the greatest. In Warsaw the survival chance is 40%, in Vienna 86% and in Amsterdam 68%. Differences may result from diagnostic techniques, (limits on) access to care, extent of detection and treatment. Since 1993, information on health and on the effectiveness of treatment methods has been gathered in the Cochrane Collaboration. Independent reviews are published in the online Cochrane Library, and concise summaries give information which can be used not only by treatment providers and clinicians but also by patients.

The Cochrane initiative chimes in well with the EU's Public Health Action Programme, one of the priorities of which is the promotion of public health by better information and knowledge. Free access to the online library, however, cannot be taken for granted for everyone in the EU. The European Union Alliance for the Dissemination of Evidence (EU-ADE) has submitted a petition to Commissioner Vassiliou, with the aim of obtaining access to the Cochrane Library for all EU citizens.

1. Is the Commission prepared to support this petition?
2. Is the Commission able and willing to invest in structural support for the Cochrane initiative in EU Member States so as to make optimum use of the collected evidence-based knowledge?
3. Is the Commission able and willing to invest in expanding the Cochrane initiative at European level in order to make comparable information available to patients via a single database in all official languages of the EU?