

WRITTEN QUESTION P-0359/04  
by Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Impact of lack of health care standards on free movement of labour and citizens

In the EU region there are no uniform standards for the care required by patients in particular conditions (e.g. those in intensive care or those recuperating in hospital after a hip prosthesis operation) or for the correct minimum ratio of various categories of staff to patients, which is an essential element in the satisfactory provision of such care. Naturally, patients must have the right to be able to trust that their health will not under any circumstances be endangered when undergoing medical treatment anywhere within the EU. It is equally vital for those working in health services themselves to know that it will be reasonably possible for them to bear the considerable responsibility associated with their work.

This issue is closely bound up with the freedom of movement of labour and citizens: from the point of view of EU citizens' safety it is important that they should be able to obtain proper care wherever they travel within the EU, should they require it. Similarly, in the interests of labour mobility, it is necessary to be sure in advance that, for example, if a nurse takes a job as a nurse in another Member State, he/she will not be compelled to take on the responsibilities of a doctor or, when doing any job, to do more work than is humanly possible. An analogy with EU rules on health and safety at work with reference to transport safety, for instance, is not difficult to find. Moreover, compliance with this requirement should be readily achievable in a field where recognition of professional competence is governed by EU directives.

Is the Commission aware of the discrepancies which exist, both between EU Member States and within them, in standards concerning care workers and directly relating to the safety of patients and to health and safety at work? How does the Commission view the situation from the point of view of attaining free movement of citizens and of labour?