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Concepts like the multisectoral approach and people-centred health services are turning the healthcare sector upside down, putting people back at the core and breaking silos for implementing cross-sectoral policies.

The old-fashioned way of looking at healthcare services more through the prism of longevity than on the quality of life of patients is being outweighed, as European citizens are demanding a new focus on well-being.

Ensuring and delivering better health is a matter of seeing patients in a different light, leading policymakers to take their views into account and involve them more and more in the decision-making process.

Stimulating the involvement of many stakeholders as possible, even from non-health sectors, could be a challenge but also a potential breakthrough for the European health environment.

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People-centred healthcare arrives at the European Parliament

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By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com



“Integrated people-centred health services means empowering people to take charge of their own health rather than being passive receivers,” said MEP Lidia Pereira. [SHUTTERSTOCK]

A different approach to healthcare looping around health needs and expectations of people rather than diseases was touched on in an event at the European Parliament, where participants and speakers called for more patient empowerment in the EU health agenda.

People-centred health services adopt the perspectives of individuals, their families and communities where they live in, considering patients more as participants and beneficiaries of a trusted health system.

The aspect of the quality in healthcare and well-being is becoming crucial as a new emphasis is shifting to the challenges of high survivorship,

rehabilitation and continuity of care.

In an event at the European Parliament organised by AHF Europe, representatives from national parliaments, civil society and stakeholders shared their views on how the concept of ensuring better health by putting the individual at the

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core could be better spread.

Evidence collected from HIV, tuberculosis or sexually transmitted infections cases showed that health systems targeting the needs of people and communities are more effective, as they improve health literacy and patient engagement, making them better prepared to respond to health prices.

“Multi-sectoral approach, patient-centred care and social inclusion are pillars of more efficient and more sustainable European health services,” said Portuguese MEP Lidia Pereira, a fresh face from Europe’s People Party (EPP).

She stressed that a multi-sectoral approach is slowly entering in the European decision-making process. For instance, health programs financing is already linked to European social funds.

Pereira also mentioned the possibility to integrate future funds under the EU research program Horizon Europe through the European Commission’s services.

Regarding the people-centred approach, she said that lots of policymakers are actually not aware of what the concept means, despite its simple meaning.

“Integrated people-centred health services means putting people and communities, not diseases at the heart of health systems, empowering people to take charge of their own health rather than being passive receivers,” she explained.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

The challenge of providing better health requires also an urgent political action among the decision-makers and global policy champions, according to Georgian MP Mariam Jashi.

She said that national parliaments could make a difference deciding on

budgetary allocations, a role that is often underestimated.

“National lawmakers can have an increasingly important role in interfering both on priority setting and budget allocation and they also have a unique position as an interface with civil society and other stakeholders,” she added.

Jashi is a member of UNITE, a non-partisan initiative that tries to bring together global policymakers and national parliamentarians for fighting infectious diseases on a global stage.

UNITE identifies some priority areas, including the reform of national healthcare policies, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) both at the regional and global level and vaccination policies in response to the global infectious disease challenges.

Priority countries of intervention for UNITE ranges from sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern and Central Europe, as well as Central Asia to Latin America, with a focus on vulnerable population groups, sustainable development goals (SDGs) application, outbreak and preparedness control,

WHO PUSH

In 2016 the 69th World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on strengthening integrated people-centred in WHO member states’ health systems, supporting a ‘Framework on integrated people-centred health services’.

The resolutions asked WHO countries to make their healthcare systems more responsive to people needs, preferences and expectations.

Something was being done before, but something definitely moved at the country level after this push by the WHO assembly.

“Lithuania, for example, applies some good practice regarding the integrated care, such as provision of prevention, social and rapid testing (for HIV and hepatitis C) services,” said socialist Juozas Olekas, another

newcomer in the European Parliament who is also a surgeon.

The linkage to the health services for vulnerable populations is ensured by the collaboration of healthcare workers and non-government organizations, although those efforts still need to be applied at the larger scale in order to make an impact on the overall system of welfare, he explained.

“Today the HIV epidemic still spreads among the vulnerable populations, he continued, adding that the lack of education and awareness about this problem, the limited confidence in the health professionals are complicating the access to preventive and diagnostic services.

“This is the main reason why the virus has not yet been contained,” Olekas concluded.

Although lower than in neighbouring countries, the HIV epidemic did not receive a lot of political attention in Lithuania and more than 50% of new HIV diagnoses are reported too late.

In February 2018, an order from Lithuania’s Ministry of Health following a written request by Olekas himself and MP Dovile Sakaliene expanded the use of antiretroviral treatment (ART). In prisons, for example, ART is now reimbursed from the State Health Insurance Fund.

INTERVIEW

Health campaigners praise Finnish presidency's focus on well-being

By Gerardo Fortuna | EURACTIV.com



A framework of integrated, people-centred health services was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2016. [SHUTTERSTOCK]

The Finnish presidency's approach on the economy of wellbeing was a milestone for a successful reorientation of health services towards a multisectoral approach in designing, building and delivering people-centred care, said Anna Żakowicz, director of programs at AHF Europe, an international health NGO.

In an interview with EURACTIV, she said the process of empowering

patients should be supported by political commitment, and added that the Finnish demand to include health in other policy sectors was a step in the right direction.

"It will probably be a long journey and it requires regulatory strategies to be developed for creating a legal mandate and platform for engagement to do so. I do hope it will get sufficient momentum in the EU in the next few years," she said.

AIDS Healthcare Foundation

(AHF) is a Los Angeles-based non-profit organisation which provides cutting-edge medicines and advocacy in 42 countries worldwide, dealing mostly with the HIV epidemic.

Given that access to quality treatment for everybody who lives with HIV on this planet has not been secured, patient empowerment continues to be a question of life and death and is therefore as crucial

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now as it was in the early days of the pandemic.

“Without patients’ fight for research in HIV and fight for availability and affordability of HIV medications, we would not be where we are right now,” Żakowicz said.

According to her, the lessons learned from patients’ involvement in HIV are important for other diseases, especially for moving research agendas and ensuring access to treatment is possible.

“Their lesson was to be bold, to be engaged and to fight for your community. It is a victory of voice, presence and determination, which underlines the need to stand for what is right,” she said.

But what is required now is not only HIV treatment but also needs-based services and more people-centred care approaches. “The fight continues,” she said.

EU DEVELOPMENTS

AHF Europe is advocating for a multisectoral approach for better health of European citizens who are affected by HIV and other diseases, which takes into account the perspectives of individuals.

The framework of integrated, people-centred health services was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2016.

According to AHF Europe, the European Commission should foster collaboration between member states, individuals and communities, academic institutions, student associations, private sector, health insurers and other stakeholders to promote exchange and development of people-centred care agenda for EU.

“The Commission can also support the development of options for people-centred health systems by convening an expert panel on effective ways of investing in health,” Żakowicz said.

The renewal process of the Action Plan on EU Health Workforce gives an opportunity to add focus on the delivery of people-centred care and describe the concepts of co-production of health, task shifting and complementary and alternative medicine.

“An approach which aligns with the educational sector needs to be included there as well,” she added.

Prospective developments right now include Council Conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing that encourage the countries to put the economy of wellbeing in the centre of policy design.

The current initiative by various MEPs to advance the formation of an Intergroup focusing on the Economy of Wellbeing at the European Parliament should provide the space to develop the approaches of people-centred care even further.

“Thinking about the future, I am optimistic,” she said.

CO-PRODUCTION OF HEALTH SERVICES

In order to be able to move forward with people-centred care approaches, different stakeholders to need to collaborate while governments and ministers of finance need to secure adequate funding for reforms and implementation research, Żakowicz pointed out.

Communities, individuals and civil society organisations should, therefore, be involved in developing services which focus on patient empowerment and advocacy.

“The educational sector, as well as academic and training institutions, will need to play an important role in developing new professional curricula for the health workforce,” she added.

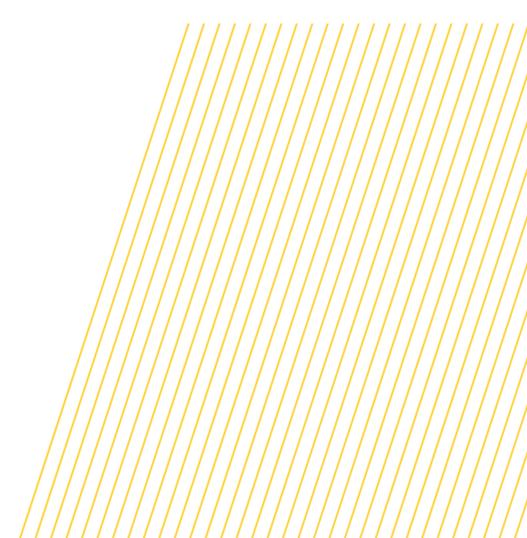
Education will be an important part of the equation as getting back to notions of self-care and health education in the society is needed.

“In particular, integration of

services is an important part of people-centred care, urban and rural areas planning are crucial to ensure equity in accessing quality care,” she said.

When asked if a difference between Eastern and Western countries persists when it comes to healthcare, she said it is part of the historic reality of EU countries, which had an inevitable influence on the economy and therefore affected health services.

“It is important to learn, exchange experience with colleagues that work in Western Europe,” she said. “As some countries in Western Europe have experience with implementing people-centred services, this sharing would be very beneficial.”





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