EULAR calls on EU to create European Single Market for Health

Brussels, 13/10/2015: The European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR) has called on the EU to create a genuine European Single Market for Health. Obstacles preventing Europeans from making full use of social rights and ideas how to overcome them laid at the heart of EULAR’s annual Brussels conference. MEPs Takis Hadjigeorgiou and Karin Kadenbach, who supported the conference, stressed the importance of increased action on health care by the EU. Key elements of the Single Market for Health should be an integration of national health care services, coupled with stronger efforts in reducing access barriers to quality health care.

According to EULAR, the current EU approach to health care lacks ambition and is not sufficiently prioritised by the European Commission. EULAR particularly criticised the tendency to neglect health as field of European policy making and called for rapid adjustment. To achieve improved health care for citizens across Europe, a Single Market for Health should therefore be one of the central projects of the European Commission over the coming years. Such ambition would bring positive results for patients and health professionals alike. Ambitious proposals would find strong support among stakeholders, first and foremost EULAR.

Despite the additional benefits offered by the increasingly integrated provision of health care in the European Union, people with chronic diseases such as rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) can often not reap the benefits of this integration, as they still encounter many barriers in receiving quality treatment abroad. EULAR therefore welcomes the European Commission’s commitment to monitor correct implementation of EU legislation in this field.

EULAR President Prof. Gerd R. Burmester summarised the concerns of many participants who felt that there are still too many barriers. Insufficient awareness, a lack of information and recognition of professional qualifications represent only some of the challenges patients and health professionals face. Removing these barriers is, however, key to reducing the burden of RMDs and other chronic diseases for individuals, health and social care systems, as well as the wider economy.

Prof. Burmester stressed that “a Single Market for Health should be seen as an investment that has the potential to alleviate the burden of RMDs and chronic diseases and should be supported by Member States and regions, as well as other stakeholders.”

In his opening speech MEP Takis Hadjigeorgiou, who hosted the conference, said that “the fragmentation of Europe’s health care systems has made the integration of health care in Europe fundamentally lacking behind other developments such as the Single Market.” He also emphasised that it was now “necessary for everyone, from Member States to regions and EU institutions, to become more ambitious in order to tackle the health care challenges we can best deal with jointly”. In this context he specifically pointed to access to health care and the integration of health care services as challenges deserving more EU-wide action.

Access to health care is a key element in achieving optimal care for patients with RMDs and other chronic diseases. In its position paper on the topic, EULAR calls on the EU as well as the Member States to facilitate access to health care. It lays down the obstacles that prevent people with RMDs and other
chronic diseases from being able to access quality health care, and lists concrete recommendations for policy-makers at the various levels.¹

MEP Karin Kadenbach also underlined the lack of action by the European Commission and other actors on health care, in particular with respect to chronic diseases such as RMDs. She stressed that the European Parliament stands ready to move forward and will strongly support further action on a better-worked integration and interconnection of health care services in the EU.

About RMDs

RMDs are one of the most burdensome chronic conditions affecting European societies, including more than 200 different diseases (all painful conditions of the musculoskeletal system). It is an issue that is increasing significantly given ageing populations. More than 120 million people in the EU are affected by RMDs (1 in 4 Europeans). RMDs are the number one cause of disability in Europe, with the total yearly economic burden of RMDs standing at more than € 240 billion.

About EULAR

The European League against Rheumatism (EULAR) is an umbrella organisation which represents scientific societies, health professional associations and organisations for people with RMDs throughout Europe. EULAR aims to reduce the burden of RMDs on individuals and society and to improve the treatment, prevention and rehabilitation of rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases.

To this end, EULAR fosters excellence in education and research in the field of rheumatology. It promotes the translation of research advances into daily care and fights for the recognition of the needs of people with musculoskeletal diseases by the governing bodies in Europe through advocacy action.

To find out more about the activities of EULAR, visit: www.eular.org

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¹ The comprehensive position paper, as well as a summary can be found on the EULAR website under http://www.eular.org/public_affairs_position_papers.cfm