



EUROPESE COMMISSIE
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Health systems, medical products and innovation
Performance of national health systems
Head of Unit

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Mrs Norma Camilleri
By email: president@cplol.eu

Dear Mrs. Camilleri,

Thank you very much for your letter of 28 April in which you express your concerns about protection of Speech-Language Therapists and Logopedists during the pandemic crisis.

Regrettably, the COVID-19 crisis has put a strain on the capacity of some health systems to ensure protection of health workers. Similarly, some patients have been particularly exposed during the crisis: their continued access to the medical care appeared problematic, which shows weaknesses in capacities of the health and social care systems to provide the continuous assistance to patients under unprecedented circumstances. The epidemic is a defining moment for health systems and stresses a need for modernisation of the way of rendering services, including, as you suggest, through e-solutions.

According to Article 168(7) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the organisation and delivery of health services, medical care and the organisation of health insurance systems is a national competence. It is therefore Member States, who decide which health services are reimbursed and on conditions of reimbursement. We cannot set any standards at European level on the design of healthcare baskets. However, accessibility of healthcare is high on our agenda. The European Pillar of Social Rights affirms everyone's right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality¹. Article 35 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights also enshrines people's right of access to treatment and care and Sustainable Development Goals reaffirm the commitment to ensure universal healthcare coverage. The Communication on building a strong social Europe for just transitions², paving the way towards the Action Plan of Implementation of the European Social Rights, is an opportunity to strengthen the response to needs and ensure that nobody is left behind.

European Commission supports the Member States to address country-specific challenges in the performance of health systems, which are identified within the

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_20_49

European Semester analysis. Problems related to a broad range of issues, including e-health solutions, challenges faced by healthcare professionals, problems with accessibility, need to reshape the service delivery to make it more responsive to healthcare needs are systematically analysed in Country Reports. Country-specific recommendations addressed to Member States within the European Semester invite them to take measures to alleviate critical barriers in access to healthcare along recommendations to improve effectiveness and sustainability of healthcare systems.

Digital solutions for health and care can increase the well-being of millions of citizens and radically change the way health and care services are delivered to patients, if designed purposefully and implemented in a cost-effective way. It can also contribute to addressing the health crisis such as the one caused by the Covid-19 pandemics. New technologies, including telehealth solutions, have great potential to ensure continuity of care in scenarios where face-to-face visits are not possible or safe. During the current pandemic crisis, the use of telehealth, such as videoconferencing tools, can protect both patients and the health professionals. While not only providing safe means by which therapy/rehabilitation can be carried out, videoconferencing tools can ensure care for patients with symptoms of infection or recognised as being infected with Covid-19. The European Commission supports Member States' implementation and deployment of telehealth technologies provided that personal data protection and privacy is fully ensured. In 2020, the Commission will launch a study on the regulatory gaps and obstacles for cross-border provision of digital healthcare in the EU. The objective is to identify the main legal and regulatory gaps that might negatively impact on the provision and greater uptake of digital health services, including telehealth solutions, and provide evidence base to the European Commission in order to enable informed policy making in the future. Main stakeholder groups, including health professionals and patient organisations, will be consulted as part of the study.

European Funds offer a direct means of support to the health systems in Member States. More than €8 billion have been invested from the European Structural and Investments Funds in around 7,100 health-related projects from 2014 to 2018. In the context of COVID-19, the Commission launched the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to allow Member States use flexibly their remaining allocations of European Structural and Investments Funds to strengthen their health systems. The Commission also launched fast joint procurement procedures for essential medical equipment, including protective gear for health workers; have started stockpiling key medical equipment via the rescEU programme; and allocated the remaining EU budget of 2020 (€2.7 billion) into the Emergency Support Instrument to finance health system needs: equipment, supplies, and scaling-up of testing and treatments. Finally, the Commission is working on repurposing the Multi-annual Financing Framework for 2021-2027, to ensure appropriate support to the response and recovery from Covid-19 and similar public health threats in the future.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and I commend you for your efforts to continue delivering care to your patients. We agree that health systems should be in position to care for all those in need, whether they suffer from Covid-19 or other conditions.

Yours sincerely,

(e-signed)
Sylvain Giraud