

To:
Mr. José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission
200 rue de la Loi
1049 Brussels, Belgium

Madrid, 29 of February 2013

Dear Sir,

My name is Pedro Gonzalez and I write as the president of an association of health professionals called AFEM (*). I am writing in order to call your attention on the matter of recent changes in health-policy in Spain.

As you probably know, Spanish Public Health System is internationally recognized for its excellent health outcomes and coverage, even having one of the lowest investments in this area in the European Union. In Madrid for instance, we provide not only excellent clinical results, but also high level investigation and pre- and post-graduate teaching, as we consider it is absolutely necessary for a sustainable and qualified health service.

The recent, and still going on economic crisis in Spain, makes us aware that changes in our Public Health System are necessary as far as cost-effectiveness is concerned, as that will enable us to maintain our current outcomes using less public money. After a deep analysis, we have reached to the conclusion that the plan recently signed by the Madrid Autonomous Community in order to save on the health budget, will create new inefficiencies, will undermine access to health services and will reduce quality of care, overall damaging health outcomes and increasing costs in the short and long term.

As health professionals, we think improvements in costs are not the only challenges to look out for. Working professionals in our Public Health System are the ones that should guide this risky decision-making. For instance, we consider primordial introducing other kind of reforms like professional independence to take decisions based on local health real demands. This way, the professional team could go adapting to its aging population, increased chronic diseases, local greater demand for healthcare, etc.

Unfortunately, the recently approved plan called “Plan de Medidas de Garantía de la Sostenibilidad del Sistema Sanitario Público de la Comunidad de Madrid” (Plan to Guarantee the Sustainability of the Madrid Community Public Health-Care System), will not give the adequate answers to none of these arising problems and will produce negative and irreversible changes in our beloved health system. Nonetheless, this plan has not been accorded or talked through with anybody; neither professionals, patients nor citizens. It is apparently supported just under the concept of improving health efficiency (concept that has not been proved by the government yet). In conclusion, it is a plan signed with no previous efficiency study and with no previous approval by healthcare professionals.

The current reform that includes the privatization of healthcare provision for about 1.200.000 patients, will lead to a double public system in which the privatized providers will increase their budget in about 5% (as part of the contracts); and the budget in 100% public health will decrease (20% this year). These inequalities will start from the very beginning, as the government will pay around 70 million euro more yearly to these companies for the population’s healthcare. As a result, this plan far from reconciling fiscal consolidation targets, will increase health investment and in less than a couple of years will force to reduce medical care (just like is happening in Greece i.e.).

As citizens and health care providers, we believe these reforms will divide patients into two groups: those who will not be able to pay for medical extra benefits and those who will. Only by reducing healthcare inequalities we will contribute to social cohesion and will avoid the poor-health spiral that leads to poverty and exclusion.

In the past few months, a document elaborated by AFEM, in which we offer collaboration to introduce all the necessary reforms in the Public Health System, has been hand out to the Madrid Government. This document has been ignored by both, the Madrid and Spanish Governments. If we seek for a possible explanation to this, we have the short term “false savings” that could be the key to health policy changes (or political agreements to overcome bad press). And if this plan is up and running, the “intended” or “unintended” consequences in the long term will be increased costs in healthcare, as it happened in other countries several decades ago (i.e. England).

Having said this, we ask the European Union to review the currently

approved plan called “Plan de Medidas de Garantía de la Sostenibilidad del Sistema Sanitario Público de la Comunidad de Madrid” and give our association the opportunity to explain our proposals.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Pedro González
President of AFEM (*): Asociación de Facultativos Especialistas de Madrid. Number of professionals associated: 2000

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