



INTERVIEW WITH MARIANO VOTTA

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What makes this Symposium important, what do you hope will be its outcome?

The burden that pain imposes on individuals and the enormous costs that society has to bear not only by healthcare systems but also the social, economic and employment sectors illustrates the urgency for European governments and the EU Institutions to act and to put, as a priority, the societal impact of pain on their policy agenda.

Over the years, Active Citizenship Network (ACN) has been involved with the Societal Impact of Pain (SIP) more and more. In the beginning, we attended as stakeholders. Then, we were delighted to step up ACN's role by joining the team of panelists in 2014, and this year we are nailing down our commitment by fully engaging in the 2016 SIP Symposium as a panelist and co-organiser.

One of the issues we are most interested in – and the topic of the workshop we will be participating in – is the implementation of the cross-border healthcare directive with regards to chronic pain. The protection of patients seeking care abroad is also related to an effective implementation of those aspects of the directive that may be seen of little importance, such as, for example, the reference to pain intensity.

Pain intensity is not a secondary issue at all. Evaluating improvement in pain management in healthcare systems depends on measurement criteria of pain in individuals and of the prevalence of pain in societies. Therefore, cross border and cross institutional comparison of health care services in pain care require outcome criteria on patient-, consumer-, medical- and policy level.

We hope that the outcome of the SIP 2016 Symposium can help open up a debate on this topic, based on case histories, experiences, good practices and issues faced in the EU member states.

Why is it important to address pain in EU policies now?

In the last few years, many initiatives – both at institutional and grassroots level – have been focusing on the patients' right to avoid unnecessary suffering and chronic pain.

At EU level, the Parliamentary Interest Group on Brain, Mind and Pain, is working hard to strengthen awareness and spread knowledge of this phenomenon at institutional level. And it is also the same for the MEP Interest Group on European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare, which will devote its next meeting to the topic of the degree of patient's pain, which was related to the implementation of the EU Directive on cross-border healthcare. On another hand, the experience of the "Sine Dolore World Park", organized each year in Menorca Island, Spain, is another very original and fruitful experience that gives evidence to the phenomenon.

In general, the inclusion of the issue of chronic pain in the European political agenda was certainly gratifying for those who have worked to achieve this important result, but what about the next steps?

Not enough has been done and now is the time for the EU institutions and Governments to act. It is time to join forces and work as a team, that's why this symposium is so important.

What have been the barriers to more ambitious EU policies on pain and what can the EU do to help improve pain treatment?

In Italy there is still much work to do about pain treatment, considering that 16% of patients who complain about pain are not believed or have to see their problem diminished.

For this reason, there is a section of the Technical Committee on Health of the Ministry of Health devoted to this matter. This organisation brings together 204 experts - including a representative of my organization - for advice and support in policies covering different areas of health and science.

At European level, on September 2015, the European Pain Federation (EFIC) invited for the first time civic and patients' organizations dealing with chronic pain and the respect of patients' rights against unnecessary and useless pain in its permanent Patient Liaison Committee. The same strategic decision was also taken last December 2015 by the "Societal Impact of Pain" (SIP), which has officially included in its Steering Committee the citizens and patients' points of views.

Our commitment could be to transfer these achievements from the European agenda into the European culture: to raise awareness, fight stigma, improve quality of life for people suffering for acute and severe chronic pain, reduce the socio-economic impact of chronic pain in Europe by ensuring that the right to avoid unnecessary suffering is guaranteed everywhere and to everyone.



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