

Introduction

Welcome to the February 2007 Update briefing for the Health Professionals Crossing Borders initiative. This briefing includes articles by Per Haugum of the Norwegian Registration Authority for Health Personnel and Sarah Eldred from the Forum for Osteopathic Regulation in Europe (FORE). It also provides a summary of the recent Crossing Borders meeting in Berlin and highlights relevant forthcoming events.

Sharing info for patient safety

- Per Haugum, Norwegian Registration Authority for Health Personnel



Ensuring patient safety is, and must be, a fundamental element of any system regarding mutual recognition and a single market for health personnel. In order to achieve this within the EEA, Crossing Borders - based on the content of the 2005 Edinburgh Agreement, is aiming to develop a reliable and effective approach to proactive information exchange focused on sharing information about disciplinary issues when it is in the public interest.

There are already some examples of good practice in sharing information proactively and on a case-by-case basis between competent authorities across national borders in Europe. The Nordic Zone (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Denmark), for example, consists of five countries with just under 25 million inhabitants. The Zone has an Agreement, developed within the framework of the 1983 Nordic Agreement, setting out the basis on which competent authorities should be notified about certain practitioners. For example, if a person holds registration in more than one member state and the registration is being revoked, the competent authority in the other member states must be notified. In addition, all individual decisions regarding restrictions or loss of rights are reported to all other countries within the scope of the Agreement.

Based on this experience a small working group (the Case by Case group, chaired by Per Haugum) will look to develop a similar Healthcare Professionals Crossing Borders Agreement that will enable signatories to make a firm commitment to sharing information on a case-by-case or proactive basis across the EEA. Indeed, the Edinburgh Agreement sets out an existing commitment to work towards proactively exchanging information when a health professional's right to practise has been restricted or if a competent authority has objective reasons to believe that identity or document fraud has been used to avoid restrictions or register falsely.

So far, competent authorities from countries including Ireland, Denmark, the UK and Norway have agreed to participate in the Crossing Borders working group which will develop the Agreement by October 2007. This will also be open for any other competent authority to sign-up to at this time or a later date. Any other competent authority wishing to be part of the development process should contact <mailto:cherbert@gmc-uk.org>

European Health Regulators Meet in Berlin.

On 9th February over 50 regulatory representatives from 13 European countries met at the German Medical Association in Berlin, to continue taking forward the Crossing Borders initiative.

Crossing Borders is developing a range of approaches to registration and disciplinary information exchange between regulators based on the October 2005 Edinburgh Agreement, as well as emerging as a means by which health regulators can network and discuss wider regulatory themes from a cross-sectoral and Europe-wide perspective.

Discussion focused on developing an agreement to share information proactively about registrants whose practice is in question and on making health regulation in Europe more transparent.

Presentations from France, Austria, Estonia and Cyprus were also given, demonstrating the increased use of the Certificate of Current Professional Status, which was developed by the initiative as part of the Edinburgh Agreement. All participants in the Crossing Borders project have agreed to use the Certificate template, as appropriate, and a significant number have already implemented its use.

Throughout the day discussion sessions were led by Dr. Ramin Parsa-Parsi of the German Medical Association, Per Haugum of the Norwegian Registration Authority for Health Personnel, Marc Seale Chief Executive of the Health Professions Council, and Claire Herbert, Crossing Borders Project Lead.

The main outcomes of the 1-day event included support for the development of a Crossing Borders agreement on sharing information on a case-by-case and proactive basis – based on the Nordic Agreement (see over). They also included the development of a common statement on transparent healthcare regulation in Europe, in particular furthering the availability of information for public about registered professionals, similar to the web-based searchable lists of registered professionals widely developed in the UK, in the Netherlands, and the Republic of Ireland, and considering the implications and benefits of involving stakeholders – such as patients and the general public, in the development of national regulation.



Dr. Ramin Parsa-Parsi
German Medical
Association



Gilbert Bouteille
French Order
of Dentists



Tiia Raudma
Estonian Ministry of
Education and
Research



Jannis Rippis
Norwegian Registration
Authority for Health
Personnel

Forthcoming events

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| 30 March | <i>'Shaping the Future for Community action in Health Services'</i> . EHMA conference, Brussels
http://www.ehma.org/activities/default.asp?NCID=104&NID=167
NB: Per Haugum will speak on behalf of Crossing Borders at this EHMA conference in March |
| 11 June | <i>'Pharmacists as Prescribers: The UK experience'</i> , RSPGB conference, Amsterdam
http://www.rpsgb.org/worldofpharmacy/events |
| 28-30 September | <i>'Placing the patient first: Effective nursing regulation in Europe'</i> . FEPI conference, Catvat Croatia.
http://www.fepi.org/ |
| October | <i>Healthcare Professionals Crossing Borders</i>
Autumn meeting (venue tbc) |

Developing Transparent Healthcare Regulation in Europe

At the recent Berlin meeting of the Crossing Borders initiative Sam Mars of the Health Professions Council in the UK and William Kennedy of the Medical Council of Ireland each spoke about how patients, the public and other stakeholders can engage with the national regulatory process.

Both presentations emphasised how regulation can become more effective and better able to respond to the needs of the public through greater transparency and closer engagement with stakeholders. Below is a summary of their presentations:

Sam Mars spoke about the online register of 174,000 practitioners, from 13 professions, that the Health Professions Council's (HPC) regulates within the UK. The search facility is free to use and available to anyone with access to the internet, and with the name or ID number of the practitioner. The online register enables anyone to verify that a practitioner is registered and to find out if they have any disciplinary orders pertaining to their registration. Sam also highlighted that HPC Fitness to Practise (disciplinary) hearings are announced via their website and a free email list of forthcoming hearings is also freely available. In addition HPC established and manage the <http://www.healthregulation.org/> site that provides a portal to competent authorities, of all regulated health professions, in Europe and worldwide. Overall he demonstrated that patients and the public

not only engage in the regulatory process by making complaints but also can positively use easily accessible regulatory information to make more informed choices about their healthcare.

William Kennedy, Head of Professional Standards at the Medical Council of Ireland, spoke about the engagement of stakeholders in the development of regulation and directly within the regulatory process. He described how the recent evaluation of current medical regulation in Ireland, via a number of stakeholder surveys, had demonstrated a strong degree of satisfaction with the regulatory approach by two main stakeholders – the public and the medical profession. However there was also a perceived need to modernise medical regulation and part of this process has included the passing of the 2007 Medical Practitioners Bill. This new legislation will replace the professional medical majority on the Council's governing body with a lay majority including appointments made by the Irish Health Minister. William highlighted that this development was likely to mark the beginning of a new era of co-regulation in Ireland – regulatory responsibility shared between the profession, government and lay expertise.

For more information contact: Sam Mars of the Health Professions Council on <mailto:Sam.Mars@hpc-uk.org> and William Kennedy of the Medical Council of Ireland at <mailto:Wkennedy@mcirl.ie>

Benefits of Networking for New Health Regulation - Sarah Eldred (FORE)

"It was very interesting to see how regulated health professionals tackle the challenges of exchanging information across Europe. It will be valuable for FORE to contribute to the development of Crossing Borders and help enhance public protection." Said Dr Sylke Wagner, of the Verband der Osteopathen Deutschland following the recent HPCB Berlin meeting.

Since June 2006, the 'Forum for Osteopathic Regulation in Europe' (FORE) has been involved in the Crossing Borders initiative. FORE recognises the importance of the free movement of professionals, but the impact of some EU proposals has highlighted the challenge of maintaining patient safety without consistent regulation in Europe for osteopathy. Unlike other health professions, osteopathy is in its relatively formative stages of regulation in Europe – currently it is regulated in only four of the 30 countries of the European Economic Area (EEA). Proactive cooperation and collaboration in information exchange between European competent authorities is vital in this context to ensure patient safety. For more information about Osteopathic regulation and FORE contact: <mailto:sarahe@osteopathy.org.uk>

Crossing Borders Statement on Health Services in Europe

Healthcare Professionals Crossing Borders submitted a Common Statement to the European Commission's consultation on health services in January. Over 25 individual (national or European level) organisations backed the statement that emphasises the importance of information exchange between European health care regulators for patient safety and of making appropriate registration information publicly available.

A statement from European healthcare regulators on the European Commission's Consultation on Community action on health services.

We believe:

- assurance of patient safety and professional competence should be paramount in any European Commission proposal on cross-border health services.
- all regulators must exchange information about healthcare professionals that has a bearing on patient safety in Europe and on professional competence.
- the European Commission has a role to play in facilitating easy identification of all healthcare competent authorities in Europe.
- competent authorities should be required to request a Certificate of Current Professional Status for every healthcare professional seeking registration within their regulatory jurisdiction.
- there should be legal clarity about regulatory responsibility in instances of cross-border provision of services, such as telemedicine and remote diagnosis.
- there are some common standards and principles of healthcare that patients have a right to expect from regulated healthcare professionals and these should be emphasised within existing national standards, codes and/or guidance.
- patients seeking treatment in other European member states, and those commissioning services, should have access to good quality information to enable them to exercise informed choice.

We would like to avoid:

- provisions that enable practice in another member state without the host state being able to require, at least, temporary registration or pro forma registration in that member state.
- additional restrictions to sharing information that is in the patient and public interest, while acknowledging existing legal constraints.
- confusion for patients and the public, when they access health services abroad, as to where regulatory responsibility for health professionals lies.