

HCWH Europe oral statement for WHO RC67 - Towards a sustainable health workforce in the WHO European Region: framework for action

Wednesday 13th Sept., 09:00 – 10:30

The objective of Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe is not only to help the European healthcare sector improve patient safety and care whilst reducing its environmental footprint, it is also to work towards a safer environment for healthcare professionals. As part of this broad mission, we have been active in tackling the health issues linked to endocrine disrupting chemicals - or EDCs -, specifically focussing on medical devices. To HCWH Europe, a sustainable health workforce is by definition a healthy workforce.

In 2009, a study was published entitled [Hazardous Chemicals in Health Care A Snapshot of Chemicals in Doctors and Nurses](#). In this study, the authors report on a biomonitoring investigation conducted by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR). They conducted the first biomonitoring investigation of healthcare professionals. The study tested their blood and urine for six chemicals or chemical groups (62 chemicals in all). The results were worrying and, amongst the findings, it was discovered that: Each participant had at least 24 individual chemicals in their body, and two participants had a high of 39 chemicals detected, and eighteen chemicals were detected in every single participant. All participants had bisphenol A, and some form of phthalates.

The framework for action at the WHO European Region level should therefore make it a priority to work towards a safer, healthier environment for healthcare professionals and could potentially work with the European Human Biomonitoring Initiative to specifically monitor the exposure of doctors and nurses to EDCs.

Additionally, health professionals need to play a vital role in tackling antimicrobial resistance. Health Care Without Harm Europe works to raise awareness about the extensive role that this key professional group can play in this regard. Applying the 'one

health' approach and working cross sectorally is the best way forward to find solutions to contain the global crisis.

Health professionals can help to inform patients about the antimicrobial drugs they consume and the risks associated with the antimicrobial therapy. By educating patients, health professionals can also improve public awareness of pharmaceutical pollution and waste that leads to antimicrobial resistance. This professional group is therefore well positioned to take the lead and make a difference in how AMR is tackled at the international level.

Health Care Without Harm Europe invites collaboration with other stakeholders to reduce the risk of exposure of healthcare workers to harmful chemicals and encourages WHO action on this. Similarly, we stand ready to work with other actors to reduce the global threat of antimicrobial resistance, using healthcare professionals as the catalyst for change.