

Cross-border healthcare

MEPs back points championed by rapporteur

By Sophie Petitjean | Wednesday 27 October 2010

MEPs adopted by an overwhelming majority the draft recommendation by Françoise Grossetête (EPP, France) on cross-border healthcare, hailed by the chairwoman of the Environment and Public Health Committee, Corinne Lepage, as a «brilliant success». The French MEP had the massive support of fellow committee members (47 to two, with one abstention) on key provisions such as prior authorisation, advance payment and rare diseases.

«The challenge is to make access and reimbursement of cross-border healthcare easier for all European patients. It is essential for the EU to provide a practical response to patients wondering whether their treatment will be reimbursed when they need to cross the border. Today, the EP strived to prevent the risks of legal uncertainty for patients by clearly spelling out the cases where a member state could refuse reimbursement or the right to obtain treatment in another member state,» said Grossetête after the vote.

The committee first restricted the reasons for which a member state of affiliation can refuse prior authorisation. Its members considered that authorisation could only be refused if the patient is not affiliated to the social security system or is exposed to a safety risk that cannot be considered acceptable. Once prior authorisation has been granted, a member state may not refuse to reimburse the patient.

MEPs then limited as far as possible the cases in which patients will have to pay in advance for the costs of treatment. They encourage alternatives, such as direct contact between the relevant authorities of the member state of affiliation and the hospital providing the treatment or payment by the social security systems of the member states responsible, pursuant to Regulation 883/2004/EC [regulation coordinating social security systems]. If neither of these two solutions is applicable, MEPs have called on member states to reimburse the costs paid by the patient «within a reasonable period».

The EP committee also backed, in a consolidated amendment, specific positions for rare diseases. It found that patients diagnosed with or suspected of having rare diseases are entitled to seek healthcare in another member state and to be reimbursed if the diagnosis and/or treatment in question is not possible in the member state of affiliation. However, the treatment is subject to prior authorisation.

For Greens sitting in the committee, the vote on this issue represents a fair balance between guaranteeing patients' right to cross-border healthcare and safeguarding quality national healthcare systems.

"The challenge is to make access and reimbursement of cross-border healthcare easier for all European patients," says French MEP Françoise Grossetête