



**TOWARDS HIGHER PATIENT SAFETY IN EUROPEAN HOSPITALS.  
Innovation in Hygiene and Sanification To Reduce Healthcare Associated Infections and  
Antimicrobial Resistance**

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10.00 -12.00 European Parliament

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**Welcome address**

Dear Institutions, dear participants,  
Good morning and thanks you for joining us today.

A special thanks to the Member of the European Parliament Brando Benifei, hosting this event, who is particularly sensitive to the requests and petitions coming from civic associations and from those committed to the protection of patients' rights. Indeed, this isn't the first time he is hosting an initiative promoted by Active Citizenship Network, and we are extremely thankful for this.

Additionally, today we have received the support of the MEPs Interest Group "European Patients' Rights and Cross-border Healthcare". I am glad to remind you all that this Interest Group was launched in 2015 following the widespread request of almost 100 civic and patient organizations sent to the EU Parliament to officially recognize the value of citizens' initiatives involved in the promotion of health as a common good. This is in fact the hallmark of our network, and it is exactly the perspective of today's meeting, focused on patient safety, one of the principles at the core of the European Charter of Patients' Rights and a milestone of any National Healthcare System.

As we all know, healthcare associated infections and antimicrobial resistance have been identified by the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) as a significant danger for patients' safety and health care more generally.

Infections due to antibiotic-resistant bacteria have triggered the development of coordinated and comprehensive national, European, and global actions plans. Additionally, persistent contamination of hospital surfaces contributes to the transmission of healthcare associated infections, and it is not efficiently contrasted by conventional cleaning. This being said, most healthcare associated infections and other adverse events occurring in hospitals are preventable. EU Member States must protect patients from preventable harm and prevention must be at the core of national healthcare policies and strategies. At the same time, this preventive approach should be a priority also for all the actors involved in the healthcare sector, including the private ones and advocacy groups.

Over the years, our commitment to promote patient safety and prevention, first at the national level and then also at the European level, has allowed us to work on three different directions:

- Raise awareness of the phenomenon among citizens, stakeholders, and institutions thanks to a collection of data coming from citizens and patients;

- Verify the respect of quality standards stated in the procurement contracts of hospitals' services of hygiene and sanification;
- Gather good practices and potential solutions useful to reach a balance between a sustainability of healthcare systems and a practical access to a high quality and safe care, which is our main goal for the coming years.

In these regards, a better control of the pathogen contamination is fundamental, also taking into account that healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) affect up to 15% of hospitalized patients in Europe. As a result, there is an urgent need for more effective ways to reduce pathogens. And today we have the opportunity to discuss about this.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control estimates that approximately over 4 million patients acquire a healthcare-associated infection in the European Union every year. The number of deaths occurring as a direct consequence is estimated to be greater than 30.000. Healthcare associated infections account for twice the burden of 31 other infectious diseases.

Unsafe care has not only consequences for patients' health and EU citizens' trust in healthcare systems, but it also has a significant impact on our economy. Overall, the available evidence suggests that 15% of hospital expenditure and activity in OECD countries can be attributed to treating safety failures. This is likely to be a conservative figure.

Well:

- What are the causes for the discrepancy between the high incidence of healthcare associated infections/ Infections due to antibiotic-resistant bacteria and its scarce perception?
- How could we favor the adoption of innovative practices able to effectively contrast similar phenomena?
- Are we aware that suppliers in the healthcare sector can play a role to improve patient safety as well?
- In order to guarantee a multi-stakeholder governance approach in our healthcare system, how could we guarantee a better cooperation and exchange of information across different actors and different levels?
- In view of the next European elections, what certainties do we have that the issue of healthcare-associated infections and of antimicrobial resistance will be considered by European institutions among the priorities for the next 5 years?

I am addressing these questions to our speakers, whom I thank in advance for accepting our invitation to this event. I am sure that they will be able to provide us some useful indications on what direction to undertake in order to better tackle the phenomenon in the near future.

Obviously, we are aware of the fact that the theme of patient's safety is extremely wide and that it is not possible to approach all its numerous aspects, nor to confine it to the hospitalization context or to the condition of hospitalized patients. Therefore, we have decided to focus on one specific aspect, not strictly clinical, as the one of sanification. Indeed, we think that hygiene represents a matter for which the civic society, if properly informed and aware, could help make a difference in promoting and leading to changes.

As I have already said, the burden of healthcare-associated infections cannot be restricted to hospitals and patients, but healthcare workers and citizens can be affected as well. The concept of continuity of care should be replaced by continuity of safe care, not just in the hospital but also at home (what, for example, happens after a day surgery?) and, of course, in long term care homes for elderly and chronic patients. In these contexts, the lack of official data represents a hint that the phenomenon of healthcare associated infections could be underestimated and consequently neglected and tackled in the wrong way. We thus consider it appropriate to sensitize all the actors to foster alliances towards a shared and informed approach.

Before I finish, please let me talk a little bit about my country.

I come from Italy<sup>1</sup>, a country with one of the highest numbers in Europe for healthcare associated infections, with 530 thousand cases every year. This issue is not immediately visible, but it is highly concrete and unluckily worsening. As the most recent data of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control report, every year there are about 33 thousand persons in the EU that die due to antibiotic-resistant infections, most of which contracted while in hospital. Almost one third of these infections are found within my country. But what evidently emerges from the study of the ECDC is that today, in Italy, the probability of contracting infections during hospitalization is equal to 6%: 1 of 15 patients every day. In Italy there are 7.800 (7 thousand 8 hundred) deaths every year, which is twice the number of deaths for car accidents. These numbers place Italy at the bottom of European rankings, underlining how urgent and necessary it is to pay attention to such phenomenon, also because the economic impact on the national healthcare system is remarkable, considering that the costs for the treatment of each single infection vary from 5 to 9 thousand euros.

Well, my turn is over now. I just want to thank all the panelists in advance for their contributions, and to give a special thanks to Brian Maguire, who accepted to be here with the role of moderator. He is a Brussels-based journalist, producer and broadcaster with great expertise in European politics and business. He already had the opportunity to face this topic in other occasions, so he is the right person to chair today's event.

Thanks again for your attention. I wish you a fruitful meeting.

Mariano Votta

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/33000-people-die-every-year-due-infections-antibiotic-resistant-bacteria>