

Interview with Ferruccio Fazio, Vice Minister of Health, Ministry of Health & Welfare Italy



21.09.2009

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Following the successful result of the “Piano Sanitario Nazionale” 2005 – 2008, could you introduce to ours readers the key priorities and main health policies to be implemented by 2009 onwards to foster maximum quality and equality in health for all citizens, highlighting those concerning preventive Health?

The current government intends to confirm and implement the necessary initiatives to ensure the maintenance of the National Healthcare System’s (Servizio Sanitario Nazionale – SSN) characteristics: quality, appropriateness, safety and effectiveness of care, definition of the Minimal Assistance Levels (Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza – LEA), evaluation of healthcare technologies, and efficiency in directing healthcare companies.

Along these lines, a priority is to operationally relaunch and organically reshuffle the planning of preventive interventions- a sector in which strong margins can be generated to improve Italy’s general health conditions.

In addition, main guidelines also include a redefinition of the role and organizational methods of primary care, aiming at ensuring a wide continuity between hospital care and territorial access, which is necessary yet still not fully and adequately ensured.

Finally, the commitment to upgrade therapeutic diagnostic channels will come as a third target, based on clinical evidence and cost-effectiveness criteria.

Looking at the future, and as to remain the WHO-rated second best country in the world for the quality of its healthcare services: how will the Italian Ministry of Health and Welfare find the balance between the necessary rationalizations of expenses versus the long-term sustainability of the National Healthcare System?

Recent political actions keep ensuring a continuous increase of the SSNs funding, therefore paying particular attention to healthcare in a context of ever decreasing available resources for public expenditure.

The direct link between the SSN funding and the country's GDP evolution, established in the recent years through agreements between the State and Regions, enables to ensure the maintenance of the SSN's universal nature and a full coverage of the Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza, yet requiring accelerated cost-rationalization processes.

In this regard, the Italian Ministry of Health and Welfare intends to start working on a new agreement with the regions.

Such discussions will tackle the main issues related to the efficiency of healthcare expenditure; especially by redesigning the hospital networks, increasing the levels of prescription rationalization, improving the SSN's staff management and purchasing policies, and drawing clear conclusions about the revision of the Livelli Essenziali di Assistenza, in order to implement a long-term technological and organizational-oriented healthcare system in Italy.

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