

SEPSIS

Improving Prevention, Diagnosis and Clinical Management

27 June 2018

How can EU policymaker and health stakeholders work together to improve Sepsis prevention, diagnosis and clinical management? How to ensure timely and accurate Sepsis diagnosis to save lives and healthcare resources?

These were the questions at the heart of the discussion of the 1st Roundtable debate of the European Network for Safer Healthcare organised with Global Sepsis Alliance (GSA) under the coordination of Health First Europe. With the support of MEP Faria (EPP, PT) and MEP Caputo (S&D, IT), health stakeholders, national representatives and the European Commission met to discuss the current challenges and opportunities to fight Sepsis in Europe and to pave the way for the future actions at both European and national level.

Sepsis is a potentially fatal condition manifesting when the body's response to an infection, damages its own tissues and organs. Sepsis is one of the biggest health issues in the EU and worldwide due to its high incidence, mortality and economic cost.

According to Prof Dr. Konrad Reinhart, Chair of the Global Sepsis Alliance *"Every year in the EU more than 3.4 million of people develop Sepsis. 700.000 do not survive and an additional one-third of survivors die during the following years. Many survivors face lifelong consequences, such as physical, psychological and cognitive problems"*.

Moreover, sepsis also contributes to death in cancer patients, people with heart disease, accident victims. Estimates suggest that the number of deaths where sepsis is a contributing factor could be 10-15 times higher than the ones mentioned above. Sepsis is the pathology with the highest hospitalization costs. In Europe, the costs of severe sepsis are typically 23.000-42.000 € per sepsis period per patient. In the EU, 300.000-500.000 severe sepsis cases (60-100 per 100,000 inhabitant) cause 7-21 billion € of health costs per year.

Therefore, *"it is time to make sure the patient safety, HAIs prevention, screening and management including sepsis have the necessary attention in the EU political agenda"* as stated by MEP Faria.

While sepsis management is under the remit of the Health Ministries of Member States, there is an important political space at the European level which informs policy and highlights patient safety issues. In a busy and challenging clinical environment with competition for limited resources, sepsis needs strong political leadership and clinical leadership that stretches across silos in healthcare provision.

Sepsis can be prevented by reducing infections, including through vaccination, by early recognition involving strategies to intensify public awareness and by ensuring that health professionals and systems are equipped to treat sepsis as an emergency (early identification, diagnosis and treatment). The WHO Sepsis Resolution gives a template for a structured approach to Sepsis prevention and management which should be promoted, supported and implemented by the EU policymakers.

Unfortunately, as pointed out by MEP Caputo *“today, only very few European countries have followed the call of the WHO Resolution on Sepsis to develop national Action Plans for improving the prevention, early recognition, and management of sepsis in both adults and children”*. Raising awareness among citizens and healthcare professionals is a key element to tackle Sepsis. Far less than 50% of EU citizens knows the word and meaning of Sepsis.

As starting point, highlighted at the event, it is necessary to have a clear definition of sepsis (clinical criteria, labels, identification and coding issues). Reliable and accurate data on Sepsis cases at the European level should be collected to clearly understand the economic and social burdens of Sepsis. As pointed out by Prof. Calandra from the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases: *“It is necessary to promote the concept of Sepsis and create a sepsis patient pathway”*.

The sad reality is that a Sepsis patient faces varying odds of survival according to the hospital where they check in. Depending on luck is just not good enough. The human and economic costs can be dramatically reduced through better hygiene, better prevention and better early diagnosis and screening. Infection prevention and control (IPC) - as a practical, evidence-based approach - prevents patients and health workers from being harmed by avoidable infections. Preventing and timely diagnosis can avoid unnecessary harm and at times even death. In addition to the latter, they save money, reduce the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and support high quality, integrated, people-centred health services. All participants agreed that a joint and multi-level approach is necessary to win the fight against Sepsis. Awareness, infection prevention, rapid and accurate diagnosis can save lives.

This meeting was meant only as a spring board on our fight to improve Sepsis prevention, diagnosis and clinical management in Europe. European and national policymaker, health stakeholders and patients need to engage now to tackle this public health emergency.

It urges a wide Sepsis multi-level campaign to raise awareness among at the European and national level. EU Policy makers have a role to play in the fight against Sepsis in Europe by:

- Promoting and coordinating European epidemiology studies to show the real burden of Sepsis in Europe under the guide of the European Commission and ECDC;
- Designing a Pan-European Sepsis management program under the AMR initiative led by the European Commission;
- Facilitating the implementation of national programs for Sepsis management;
- Launching a multi-level campaign to raise awareness on Sepsis.

As highlighted by MEP Caputo in his closing remarks *“It is necessary to expand the existing EU research on infection control and AMR to better understand the human, medical and economic burden of sepsis for Europe. In this context the role of the Commission and in particular DG RTD, is essential”*.

MEP Faria added *“We need to work together at all levels of governance. The European, national and regional level should make a joint effort to protect our health but more importantly to protect everyone`s health”*.