

Ensuring a functioning health care system for ageing populations in Slovenia

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Slovenia, which may be treated as one region because of its small number of citizens, is faced with an ageing population similarly to other developed countries, and at the same time an additional decrease in population is expected due to a lower number of youth and women in the fertility period and the low fertility rate. An ageing population brings many consequences for society, significantly influencing the health care system because the needs of health care services for the elderly are different from those for other citizens.

Health care policy-makers in Slovenia were already aware more than 40 years that the elderly have specific health problems which have to be solved in a specific manner. Therefore, in 1966 the Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics was established, but it was closed in 1989, and consequently its educational and research activity wound down and Slovenia was left without the only such institute which it urgently needs due to ageing population and the related growing needs in gerontology.

In Peer Review we want to present:

- the new establishment of an institute undertaking interdisciplinary gerontological activities with other disciplines and sectors;
- the educational and research activity of the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations in the field of gerontology and geriatrics.

Because of the increasing needs of gerontological activity in Slovenia, the government document 'The Strategy of care for the elderly till 2010 - Solidarity, living together and quality ageing of the population' was adopted in 2006, which envisaged re-establishing the Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics within an interdisciplinary framework with other disciplines and sectors. Public tasks in the field of social gerontology during this time were already performed by the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations, which is why it was reasonable to implement cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the Institute. The Ministry of Health and the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations signed a Letter of Intent for cooperation in the field of geriatrics and gerontology in 2007, which began to be implemented in 2008 with the adoption of the Work Programme of the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations. According to this programme, the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations carries out the following tasks for the Government of RS:

- Regular permanent task: "Provision of contemporary knowledge in the field of gerontology, geriatrics, and intergenerational relations in the Slovenian space".
- Regular permanent task: "Organisation, implementation and management of health gerontology in Slovenia". The Institute took over the coordination of activities for the

preparation of educational programmes and gerontology and geriatrics for all professional profiles in health care. The proposals for educational content should be prepared by the end of 2009.

- Research assignment: "Views, needs and potential of the third generation in Slovenia".
- Project: "Establishment of the Slovenian network of ageing-friendly cities and their participation in the global network of the World Health Organisation".
- Project: "Development and establishment of local intergenerational centres in Slovenia".

The adopted work programme again introduces educational and research activity in the field of gerontology and geriatrics in Slovenia.

In Peer Review, in addition to the presentation of establishment and work of the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations, we also want to discuss the suitability of the planned organisation of health care for the elderly in Slovenia in relation to the experience of experts from other participating Member States with more experience in organising such care. Slovenia believes that the majority of health care needs of the older population will be in primary health care, which has to be organisationally and professionally strengthened for this task. Because we are faced with permanent shortages of staff in primary health care, in particular in the countryside, the sphere of activity of health professions will have to be redefined for the integrated health care of the elderly. In particular, more services will have to be added to the senior registered nurse profile, since the nurses' knowledge and skills are not utilised enough. In Slovenia there are practically no gerontology specialists, or appropriate specialist training for doctors available. The Ministry of Health plans to implement specialised training for doctors in gerontology and geriatrics because, according to the needs of gerontologists in Slovenia, one gerontologist is needed per 100 hospital beds. At present, it is still not clear whether, with respect to the small size of Slovenia, it is better to organise health care for the elderly so that treatment could be offered in one place in a central institute for the entire country, or, given the lesser mobility of the elderly, treatment with the help of gerontologists should be offered in several existing institutions.

More on the 'Strategy of care for the elderly till 2010 - Solidarity, living together and quality ageing of the population' is available in Slovenian on the following website:

- http://www.mddsz.gov.si/fileadmin/mddsz.gov.si/pageuploads/dokumenti__pdf/strategija_vars_tva_starejsih_splet_041006.pdf

More on the work of the Anton Trstenjak Institute of Gerontology and Intergenerational Relations is available (also in English) on the following website:

- <http://www.inst-antontrstenjaka.si/>