



European Federation of
Allergy and Airways Diseases
Patients Associations



To

Commissioner Tonio BORG and **Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou**

European Commission

Directorate-General Health and Consumers and Directorate-General Education and Culture

B - 1049 Brussels

ENVI Chairman Mr Matthias Groote

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Brussels, May 7, 2013

SUBJECT: Request for EU Support in the Development of Allergology Education – ALERT PAPER

Dear EU Commissioner Borg, DG Health and Consumer Policy,
Dear EU Commissioner Vassiliou, DG Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth
Dear ENVI Committee chair Mr. Groote and dear all ENVI Coordinators,

We are contacting you today on behalf of Europe's allergic patients, health care professionals and researchers working in the field of allergy in order to underscore a topic of seminal importance in the field of healthcare. The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA), the European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS), and Allergic Rhinitis and Its Impact on Asthma (ARIA), formally request endorsement from the European Commission and European Parliament for **three** fundamental changes to healthcare systems across Europe regarding pre- and postgraduate medical education:

1. The formal recognition of a full medical specialty in Allergology and of a formally recognized sub-specialty of Pediatric-Allergology throughout all EU member countries;
2. The increase in quality and the harmonization of education for allergists and primary care physicians (PCPs);
3. The development and implementation of an educational model of Allergology in Medical Schools across Europe.

Recent statistics clearly reveal a deficit and growing disparity in the number of allergists and number of severe allergy patients across Europe. Allergies are the most frequent chronic diseases in Europe today, affecting, with the most conservative estimates, the daily lives of more than 60 million people. Both, their prevalence and severity keep on increasing.

The trend previously described is extremely worrisome for the medical community; however, of even greater concern is the lack of knowledge amongst PCPs in the field of allergology. For experts in allergy, it is one problem to see a growing deficit in healthcare for the allergy patient but a tangible knowledge gap between experts and the general practitioners seeing allergic patients more routinely is an even greater concern. As a result, EFA, EAACI, UEMS and ARIA are united in stating a crisis is pending in public health where an increase in allergy prevalence is mounting pressure on a medical community which is deprived of adequate education in the field.



The current trends suggest, especially since so many people in Europe already suffer from allergic diseases, primary care will diagnose, treat and follow-up with every second patient with an allergy between 2015 and 2040. At that time EAACI predicts that about half of the EU population will suffer from some type of allergy. PCPs will also receive patients with severe and even life-threatening allergies. As a result, primary care *must* have competence to administer first aid and understand how a referral to specialized care can improve the standard of life for their allergy patients. Without the proper knowledge and information available to them, many allergy patients will complacently accept their condition as “normal.” By this rationale, allergology must be introduced as a true and complete medical specialty and should be on the curriculum of medical schools in every European country.

We realize a surplus of allergy specialists in some countries (e.g. Italy or Spain) while in other countries (e.g. UK or France) a lack of allergologists exists. However, the free movement of allergologists is hampered by some bureaucratic issues, even if Allergology is an officially recognized specialty in those countries.

Although a patients' acceptance of their disease as a “normal condition” is a tragic consequence of the lack of specialist management on the one hand with the general under-education of PCPs in the other hand, there are other consequences as well. In the present time of economic recession and austerity, the effects of allergic diseases are especially relevant. Statistical evidence clearly show declines in productivity at work among adults and in schools among children. It is estimated that the annual cost of asthma in Europe is over € 18 billion; allergic rhinitis may cost up to € 100 billion, according to unpublished data from the Global Allergy and Asthma Network of Excellence, GA²LEN, investigators. Skin allergy care costs may be as high as that of asthma (see details in the attached literature). In addition, the costs within healthcare systems of allowing allergy patients to remain untreated are enormous and extremely difficult to ignore. The burden of allergic diseases on society arrives in the form of absenteeism from work and school, strains upon entire family units, creating problems with concentration and sleeping abnormalities. The cumulative risk to European society of allowing the growing epidemic of allergic disease to go unnoticed is both expensive and irresponsible.

EFA, EAACI, UEMS and ARIA jointly request the commitment of the European Commission and ENVI Committee of the European Parliament to endorse the following suggestions be implemented across Europe:

1. The recognition of a common educational curriculum, realized through educational programmes in medical schools and nurse training, including post-graduate specializations in allergology for ALL EU countries;
2. The admission of PCPs to similar programmes to ensure the guarantee of quality education in the field of allergology;



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3. It is essential to harmonize education for allergologists across Europe, by founding a common educational model in the field of allergology. Mutual recognition of allergology among all member states would be a first step.

In summary, the current trends for allergic diseases in Europe will not reverse itself without proper attention from the medical community and policymakers. Best practice models, such as the National Allergy Programme in Finland, are emerging to show how the societal burden of allergic diseases can be effectively alleviated. Nevertheless, such models are an exception to the general status quo for most European healthcare systems struggling to cope with the needs of an increasing number of allergy patients. EFA, EAACI, UEMS and ARIA strongly encourage the European Commission and European Parliament to act as swiftly as possible to begin to reverse the tide of allergic disease.

Yours sincerely,

Breda Flood

Breda Flood
EFA President

Nikolaos G. Papadopoulos
EAACI Secretary General & President Elect

Jan G.R. de Monchy
UEMS President

Jean Bousquet
ARIA Chairman



Enclosure: Relevant literature

Relevant Literature (in the follow up of the year of publication)

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