

FEMS MEETING, OCT 4-5, 2024, ROME

NATIONAL REPORT AUSTRIAN MEDICAL CHAMBER

1. Austrian Medical Chamber presents “health programme” to politics

On September 29th, 2024 elections to the national council will take place in Austria.

Thus, in August this year the Austrian Medical Chamber proposed an extensive “health care programme” to politics and social security institutions, which also includes a 10-point plan.

From the view of the Austrian Medical Chamber the following points are crucial for future patient care

- Health care for all citizens must not only be maintained, it has to be adapted to meet demographic developments and medical advancements
- Patients must be able to rely on a sufficient number of well-trained physicians in hospitals as well as in the self-employed sector
- Waiting time for medical interventions and medical appointments must be shortened
- Health care personnel must have an adequate amount of time for their patients
- The medical profession must remain a liberal profession

The 10-point plan embraces the following measures:

1. The medical profession needs less regulation, more flexibility and less bureaucracy. (i.e. flexible part-time contracts, job sharing etc.)
2. Patients should have the right to receive their medication directly from their physician. Physicians should have the right to dispense medicines.
3. Non-medical personnel should also be financed publicly in single primary care practices and not only in primary care units (PVE).
4. Tax benefits for practices to facilitate renting of practices should be introduced.
5. Single practices should also have the right to establish themselves as a limited liability company as other liberal professions do
6. No age limit for physicians with a social security contract.
(i.e. the current age limit of 70 needs to be lifted)
7. EU-countries must strive to educate as much doctors in their country in accordance with their needs. Migration of medical graduates constitutes a threat to medical care, currently, about 30% of graduates from Austrian medical universities do not work in the Austrian health care system.
8. The supply of pharmaceutical products in Austria must be secured.
9. The medical profession must remain a liberal profession.
10. The medical chamber must be involved in health care decisions,

2. People's Party (ÖVP) calls for compulsory professional practice for medical graduates

The election programme of the ÖVP points out that Austria needs new concepts in health care, demanding that the state should introduce compulsory professional practice for graduates.

This proposal is not entirely new, it already came up last year by Chancellor Nehammer and other politicians of the governing party, mentioning that due to the fact that the state invests about 360.000 Euro in every graduate, it would be fair if graduates were obliged to work for a 5-year period in the public system giving back something to society.

In a press release Vice-President and Chairman of the Federal Council of Employed Doctors, Dr. Mayer called the initiative a joke and a total denial of reality, as aspiring young doctors are currently waiting up to one and half years for trainings positions in a public hospital. Dr. Mayer pointed out that this situation could actually be described as a post-graduate ban on practicing the profession.

Dr. Mayer further stated that the current initiative would only make problems worse, a mass exodus of doctors would be guaranteed, calling for incentives rather than coercion. Naturally, it is in everyone's interest to have enough doctors working in Austria, but problems must be approached differently, by improving working conditions, flexible working time models, reduction of bureaucracy and investing in health personnel in order to hold doctors in the public health system, Dr. Mayer said.

Lastly, according to legal experts these plans might not be in line with the constitution and European law, as they might infringe fundamental rights such as freedom of employment or European fundamental freedoms like freedom of movement of workers.

It remains to be seen whether the ÖVP will be able to implement these plans with possible coalition partners in the next legislative period.

Current election polls predict that the ÖVP will come in as second with about 23 - 24%, while the Freedom Party is about to receive 27-28 % of the votes on September 29th, 2024. Polls further predict the Social Democrats in third place with about 21% of the votes.

3. Results of the evaluation of medical training in Austria presented

On September 11th, 2024 the results of this years' evaluation of medical training in Austria were presented. As in 2023 the evaluation was carried out in cooperation with the ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich).

This year, the awaited response of 50% was even exceeded with a response rate of 53%. The over-all results also showed that the evaluation of training has improved in all categories.

In a press release Vice-President and Chairman of the Federal Council of Employed Doctors, Dr. Mayer, stressed once again the importance of the quality of medical training: "*Good training is the key to ensuring the medical care of tomorrow.*"

The basic questions on training were the same as in 2023, i.e., global rating of the training center; professional competence; learning culture; leadership culture; error culture and patient safety; decision-making culture; operational culture; evidence-based medicine.

Improvements were especially noted in the global rating of the training centers (satisfaction and recommendation of the training site) and in the category of evidence-based medicine.

General improvements could also be seen in the rating of medical departments, 20% of the evaluated departments were rated with the highest possible mark as compared to 14% in 2023. However, 7% of the medical departments are still rated with the lowest possible mark. The results show that there is still some work to be done, consistent and continuing evaluation of the quality of medical training is crucial to improve medical training.

Poor results were seen again for the basic medical training - graduates have to undergo a 9-months basic training before entering specialist training or training towards general practice - and this should at least stimulate a process of reflection, Dr. von Langen, Chairman of the Training Committee of the Austrian Medical Chamber pointed out. Possible options would be a redesign of the basic medical training or to transfer the contents of basic medical training to the last year of medical studies, which already includes clinical practice of 48 weeks.

The results of the survey are available on the website of the Austrian Medical Chamber <https://www.aerztekammer.at/ausbildungsevaluierung>

Dr. S/CM, September 12th, 2024