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EUROPSKA UDRUGA BOLNIČKIH LIJEČNIKA**

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# Country Report Croatia

## *AEMH Plenary Meeting 2005*

The situation in Croatian hospitals did not change very much since our last report was given in April 2004. Whole last year was spent in negotiations between doctors' and nurses' trade unions and the Ministry of health about working conditions. Finally, at the end of December, a solution was found for both professions and collective labour-contracts were signed, separately for doctors and for nurses (including other hospital employees).

According to the negotiations' results the doctors should receive a 10 % rise of salaries every January in next 5 years, and will that way reach the income of comparable professions outside health service in 6 years (judges). For some working places, posing danger to ones health, additional payment was foreseen. Hospitals were also obliged to take care and pay for the CME/CPD.

Our enthusiasm and satisfaction lasted only few days. The Minister of health got ill and resigned. The nurses syndicate went to court against the signed labour contract for doctors, complaining that they were cheated, because the overall cost of increased salaries for 6.500 hospital doctors was almost equal to that for 25.000 nurses. For the first time in history one trade union was fighting against what another trade union has achieved with the employer (state). The newly nominated Minister of health (former Deputy minister) decided that the nurses' contract has to be executed and the doctors' contract was suspended until the court brings judgment. Money for our salaries was waiting in the state treasury but our labour contract couldn't come into power. The Doctors' union announced strike for March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Two days after the onset the strike was forbidden by the court. Disappointed colleagues worked regularly and waited for the final decision of the Supreme Court. The decision was negative for us saying that the strike was illegal because of some procedural mistakes.

At the same time a diminished interest for studying medicine is leading to first obvious consequences. In the last two years the number of unemployed young doctors decreased from 1.200 (about 10 years ago) to less than 200. In Croatia working time directive is not an obligation and working time on wards is not limited. There are examples during the holidays-season of younger colleagues in hospitals working up to 100 hours weekly. If we take into account that it takes at least ten years to become an experienced specialist, we're facing a very turbulent time.

Public opinion is almost unique against our demands. People agree that doctors' profession is very demanding and hard, but when it comes to salaries journalists compare **salaries** outside health sector (for regular 176 hours monthly) with doctors' **incomes** (salary + overtime = 300 hours per month). An average citizen cannot understand and support doctors' claims.

We all hope that responsible authorities will urgently find adequate solutions, because the market-law is cruel and inhuman. Appeals will not attract more students to our Schools of medicine, nor improve the safety of patients.

In whole State the financial situation in hospitals is critical, as it is the financial situation of the Croatian Health Institute (State Insurance company in Croatia). Many hospitals are in debt towards their suppliers for a long period of time and we do not see the chance to get out of this situation soon. There are restrictions in drug supply in hospitals too.

Investments in hospitals have also been restricted because of the financial problems.