



**FEDERATION EUROPEENNE DES MEDECINS SALARIES
EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF SALARIED DOCTORS**

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Date :	01-08-2012	Document:	F12-043 EN
Title:	Labour Situation in Portugal		
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The President

To

Mr Pedro PASSOS COELHO
Prime Minister of Portugal
gabinete.sepcm@pcm.gov.pt

Strasbourg, July 10, 2012

Dear Prime Minister,

For months, the FEMS (European Federation of Salaried Doctors) is concerned with the poor outcome of the health system in Portugal, due to wrong political decisions.

The global financial crisis has a negative influence on the financing of health systems, patient safety, working conditions and wages of salaried physicians in Europe. The World Health Organization has found it necessary to warn governments, asking them to maintain a high level of services to cope with the deteriorating health caused by the financial crisis. Convened in 2008 in Tallinn, the WHO (Portugal is a member) adopted the Tallinn Charter, which commits governments to invest in health to maintain equal access to care.

In 2020, there will be a shortage of 1 million health professionals in Europe, questioning 18% of the activity of health care. It is a social and political challenge across the continent.

One of the proposed solution during the Ministerial Conference on the EU Workforce for Health Care, in Brussels-La Hulpe (B) on 9-10 September 2010, in presence of the Portuguese Minister for Health, is to create the best possible working environment to attract and retain health professionals (working conditions, wages and balanced personal life/professional life). In 2011 the European Parliament has also called European authorities and EU governments to place healthcare and demography problems of health professionals at the highest level of political priorities. If the financial situation of the Portuguese health system continues to deteriorate, the medical positions will lose their attractiveness and medical shortages will worsen.

Working time is falling in Europe. From an average of 40.5 hours/week average in 1991, it dropped to 37.5 hours in 2010. However, certain professions are exempt from this average. Salaried physicians of Portugal are part of the 9% of European employees who work more than 48 hours per week. They have to work much more but earning less.

FEMS is concerned with the 2.5 million hours of medical services your government has given to external companies for the lowest price. These contracts carry a high risk to patients' safety and some aspects are against the European rules, especially the European Working Time Directive 2003/88.

Since 2011, the European Commission highlights the role of public health as a key factor for competitiveness and economic development in an aging Europe and as a cornerstone of economic success. In 2050, 45% of the European population will be over 75 years.

The program recently proposed by the European Commission "Health for Growth" is indicative of the new role given to health as an important factor in the financial revival of the Union. Health at work and the pivotal role of public funding of public health services and health and social insurance are presented as the determinants of the necessary return for growth.

We solemnly ask you to consider the recommendations of the international authorities mentioned above.

Investing in healthcare and health professionals with good working conditions, decent wages and a better balance between work and family life is an investment in the economic renewal of the EU. Ignoring this is a serious political mistake for which you will be accountable one day to the population of your country.

It will also aim to rebuild, to quickly come to a European social model that will ensure social cohesion, the only guarantee of peace on our continent. Our model of society assumes a continuation of growth and there will be no growth without a healthy population.

Portuguese doctors, especially salaried hospital doctors, will be the last bulwark against the degradation of their patients' health and they have the support of the European Medical Organizations representing the 2 million European physicians.

They will demonstrate this to your government and to the Portuguese population in the coming days.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Cl. WETZEL



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To

Mr Paulo Macedo
Minister of Health of Portugal
elisabete.oliveira@ms.gov.pt

Strasbourg, July 10, 2012

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Yours sincerely,



Dr Cl. WETZEL



Mr. Claude Wetzel
FEMS President
European Federation of Salaried Doctors
Rue Guimard 15
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium

Lisbon, July 13, 2012

On behalf of H.E. the Minister for Health of Portugal, Dr. Paulo Moita de Macedo, I thank you for your letter and I have the pleasure to inform you about some issues of our health policy.

The main objective of the Portuguese Government's health policy is to preserve the high quality universal SNS (the National Health System) the Portuguese have benefited from in the last 30 years. We have been successful so far, even though this objective needs to be achieved under severe financial constraints.

The Portuguese Government is strongly committed to continue to follow the recommendations of international institutions, in particular the European Commission and other European authorities, as you suggest. You may be aware that Portugal is under a financial assistance program, granted by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which sets strict budgetary targets and structural benchmarks, many of them applying directly to the health sector. The European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF perform quarterly reviews, and until now all reviews have been positive.

The shortage of doctors in some specialties and geographic areas, has forced the SNS to procure medical services on an hourly basis. This is not a new instrument, since hospitals in Portugal have been celebrating these contracts for many years.



The tender in question already had strong guarantees to ensure the safety and quality of services provided. Nevertheless, the Government recently introduced some changes to the tender program and its specifications, in order to make them clearer. One of the changes introduced is the express provision that the decision on the most qualified professional will be based on a score where the criteria related to doctor's qualifications and clinical skills necessary for the services being procured have a weight of 50% (the other 50% relate to price criteria).

Additionally, the Ministry of Health is committed to ensure that the actual contracting of services by SNS institutions meet quality criteria set jointly with the organizations of physicians.

Finally, this tender continues the effort to control and rationalize the use of procurement of medical services on an hourly basis in the SNS. In 2011, 2.2 million hours were procured in the SNS under this mechanism, already down from 2.4 million hours in 2010. Under Public Tender 2012/102, only 1.98 million hours will be procured for the next 12 months, and the Government plans to reduce this number further, replacing this form of service provision by full time professionals, as they become available.

Best regards

Head of Staff Minister of Health

Luís Vitório