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FNOMCeO report (ITALY)

- **1. Underfunding of the National Health Service**
- **2. The demographics of the medical profession between current shortages and future excesses**
- **3. Violence against Healthcare Professionals**

1. UNDERFUNDING OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

For many years now, Italy has been witnessing a silent but inexorable reduction in public funding of the National Health Service. Between cuts and lower revenues, the National Health Service has lost €37 billion in the last ten years: this is what emerges from the GIMBE Observatory report "The 2010-2019 defunding of the National Health Service". In the decade 2010-2019, public financing of the NHS increased overall by €8.8 billion, growing on average by 0.9% per year, a lower rate than the average annual inflation of 1.07%. In other words, the increase in public financing over the last decade has not even been sufficient to maintain purchasing power. Today, the serious sustainability crisis of the NHS no longer guarantees the population equal access to healthcare services, with serious consequences on people's health and on the increase in private spending. Faced with this scenario, the analysis of the update note of the Economic and Financial Document (September 2023) highlights a push of public health to the brink, confirming that the relaunch of the NHS does not represent a political priority in the allocation of despite limited resources. We are slipping, slowly but surely, from a National Health Service based on the protection of a constitutional right, to 21 regional health systems based substantially on the rules of the free market, ignoring, compared to other countries, that the state of health and well-being of the population affects GDP growth, since those who are sick do not produce, do not consume and often also limit the work activity of their family members.

2. THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION BETWEEN CURRENT DEFICIENCIES AND FUTURE EXCESSES

The effects of ten years of cuts on the National Health Service have necessarily had their repercussions on healthcare personnel as well. According to data from the CIMO-FESMED Federation, due to the closure of hospitals and emergency rooms, the cuts in beds and the blocking of turnover, despite the hiring to deal with Covid-19, between 2010 and 2020 the Service National health system lost 4,311 doctors. Some sectors, due to their characteristics of burdensome work and/or poor economic feedback, are particularly affected by this shortage, such as General Medicine and some hospital disciplines such as Emergency Medicine and Anesthesiology and Intensive Care.

The current shortage of doctors is also caused by inadequate training programming and is affected by what is called "doctors' flight" towards the private sector and abroad.

The "flight" of professionals from the NHS is linked to:

- remuneration issues and contractual conditions;
- work organization and working conditions;
- career prospects;
- workplace safety (violence against health professionals);
- professional responsibility;
- work-life balance (feminization of the medical profession).

Regarding university education, after years of absolutely insufficient places compared to the real need, especially with regards to specialization contracts, some factors such as the evidence of the crisis, the many expected retirements and the protests of the many healthcare organisations, including the FNOMCeO, have induced the competent Ministries to increase the places for the degree course in Medicine (+ 8,968 places in Medicine in 2024 compared to 2014) and above all the number of specialization contracts (+ 9,579 places for Medical Specializations in 2023/2024 compared to 2009 /2010).

The shortage of doctors has also led some political forces to ask for the abolition of the number limit at the Faculty of Medicine. This possibility is strongly opposed by healthcare organizations as what is needed is careful planning of training, which has not happened in past years. Based on current estimates, in fact, an excess of doctors compared to needs is expected as early as 2030, with a forecast of 19,544 new medical graduates compared to the retirement of 7,471 doctors.

3. VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Violence against healthcare workers is unfortunately a phenomenon that has now become global, deserving of in-depth analysis by governments.

As for the Italian data, Inail data estimates that 2,500 episodes of violence are reported each year by health workers as an accident at work. A figure that, as far as doctors are concerned, is certainly underestimated. In fact, the Inail complaints exclusively concern employees and not contracted personnel, such as family doctors, medical guards, colleagues from the 118, prison doctors. In addition, many doctors do not file reports, or do not go to the emergency room for assaults that do not prove injury.

According to data released by the Anaa-Assomed doctors' union, 81% of the doctors who responded to its survey reported having been the victim of physical (23%) or verbal (77%) aggression. 48% of doctors who have suffered a verbal assault consider the event 'usual', 12% 'unavoidable', almost as if it were part of the routine or were to be counted among normal occupational hazards. The percentages change slightly in those who have suffered physical violence: almost 16% consider the event 'inevitable', 42% consider it 'usual'.

It is necessary to intervene on this serious situation by fully applying Law 113/2020 on the safety of healthcare workers: it is necessary to act on the safety of healthcare facilities and operators. It is necessary to train healthcare professionals, implement risk management and communication policies towards patients. We also need a cultural revolution, so that the doctor is once again seen as an actor in the care relationship, and not as a target to be hit. From these needs arise the new initiatives of the FNOMCeO presented this year on the occasion of the third edition of the National Day for the prevention of violence against health and social-health workers, which since 2022 has been celebrated every year on March 12: a campaign of social communication and two distance learning courses on de-escalation and management of aggression and stress techniques, which aim, on the one hand, to train and inform doctors and, on the other, to raise awareness among the population on this phenomenon which is one of the causes of abandonment of the National Health Service by our professionals.