

Reform of the health care system

The health care reform was delayed due to the early elections in September 2008. Former Minister of Health, Dr. Andrea Kdolsky was dismissed and Alois Stöger was appointed new Minister of Health in December 2008.

Stöger, who pleads for central control of the health care system with regional administration, presented a consolidation plan for the health insurance funds. This plan, however, was met with disapproval by some regional divisions of the public health insurance funds, since it privileges those divisions most in deficit.

The Austrian Medical Chamber, on its part, elaborated a comprehensive concept for a reform of the health care system, which covers the following key points:

- The health care system must be strengthened on behalf of the patients and shall be adapted to the economic and medical sector.
- Debt relief of the health insurance funds
- Compensation by the federal government of all costs that are outside the intended scope of payments of the insurance funds, such as maternity allowance or sick benefits for unemployed persons, which are currently financed by the health insurance funds
- Financing of outpatient care by health insurance companies, while inpatient care is to be financed by taxes.
- Better coordination between general practitioners and specialists in free practice to guarantee better treatment of patients

CIRS

On the initiative of the Austrian Medical Chamber, a critical incident reporting and learning system will be introduced in Austrian health care system in autumn 2009. The <http://www.cirsmedical.at/> system, provided by the Austrian Medical Chamber, allows all health care professionals to anonymously report safety-relevant incidents and to have them commented by experts. It is the objective to learn from experiences made by others and thus enhance management of critical events in health care, which in turn improves patient and health care professional safety.

Consolidation of health insurance funds – Restructure package concluded

Until 30th June 2009 the Austrian Medical Chamber and the “Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions” (Hauptverband) have to conclude an agreement on how to consolidate the health insurance funds.

This restructure package respects the requirements and shows understanding for the medical profession and the working conditions of physicians and will include the following following main topics and contents:

- Comprehensive health care

- New forms of group practices (will facilitate the cooperation between physicians)
- Savings in the pharmaceutical sector (e.g. by optimization of package sizes, prescription of generics, regional projects to reduce the quantities of prescribed medicines, e-medication, restrictions of advertising for pharmaceuticals etc.)
- Develop criteria for the negotiation of doctors' fees according to the requirements of physicians and insurance funds, which should be included into the General Act on Social Insurance
- Social insurance agencies shall be involved in quality assurance and quality management in doctors' practices (with the objective of an optimization of patient safety)

Despite the rather drastic financial situation it was arranged that extra money for budget items for the future was "lopped off". These financial funds shall be primarily utilized for a modernization of the system, e.g. new services or IT-projects (thanks to the success of the electronic patient card (E-card) these projects should be promoted).

Within the next years it is planned to switch to *e-medication*, including a respective database, which should also contain OTC medicinal products.

Code of conduct

Given the current events there are some worries regarding the "Code of conduct" of the Austrian Medical Chamber (this code sets out a framework for dealing with the pharmaceutical industry and the producers of medical technology).

Currently journalists lodged accusations against the Austrian physicians which were released in book form and are rather difficult to reject. The journalists used mostly obsolete numbers, as well as figures from other countries, whereas their correctness and origin may be doubted.