In this European public health news, we are looking at some current public health topics. Ricciardi looks at the future of vaccines and calls for researchers to develop new universal criteria against which to evaluate new vaccines. Jakab writes about the public health aspects of migration, which has become a structural phenomenon creating specific challenges to health systems. Borg describes the ongoing fight against antimicrobial resistance. As he points out, this poses a challenge not only to the patient’s individual health but also to the society as a whole. The three articles show the need for European collaboration, not only among governments but foremost among researchers and professionals. EUPHA is in the centre of this: working together, exchanging best practices and letting the researchers’ and practitioners’ voices be heard.

Dineke Zeegers Paget
EUPHA Executive Director

President’s column: the future of vaccines in Europe

‘Vaccination’ was the word that Jenner invented for his treatment against smallpox (from the Latin vacca, a cow), and so successful did his innovation prove that by 1840, the British government had banned alternative preventive treatments and the word was adopted by Pasteur for immunization against any disease. After clean water, vaccination is the most effective public health intervention. Because a shared public health intervention should be properly commissioned, infant immunization schedules are already quite full and may not readily allow the addition of many new vaccines. As adverse events related to vaccines become more obvious than some diseases prevented by vaccines, targets to maintain a high level of vaccination coverage for the benefit of the community are at risk of being compromised by small, but active, groups of opponents to immunization. Last but not least, a major obstacle towards the use of new vaccines is their cost. As a consequence of the investments made in research and development, new vaccines will probably be more expensive than older ones. However, their cost effectiveness will generally be high, and the great value of vaccination as a preventive intervention should be properly compared with the costs of increasingly expensive therapeutic interventions. At this point, it should be clear that it is difficult to predict to what extent these advances will lead to effective and affordable clinical and public health interventions. Policy should therefore ensure that expertise in all the pertinent fields, public health professionals at first, prepare the ground and enable society and citizens to be equipped and respond responsibly. To make this happen, the provision of education and training for health providers in the vaccination fields and related disciplines is demanded. Some research indicates that health care providers are poorly prepared to integrate new vaccines into practice. To achieve this goal, a development of infrastructures for training courses in vaccines, health care and economics directed to public health professionals and health care providers is required.

In conclusion, an unfortunate feature of the ‘new vaccines age’ has been a tendency to exaggerate the scope and timing of these important public health interventions. Because a shared methodology for a proper evaluation of new vaccines does not yet exist in Europe, health service research should work hard to identify universal criteria against which to evaluate new vaccines, taking into account also the acceptability of and the potential for harm from the testing process itself. So, public health professionals and policymakers in the next decade would do well to clarify the conditions in which the ‘new vaccines revolution’ would result in public health benefits.

Walter Ricciardi
EUPHA president

EUPHA office column

Although most attention of our members is focussed on the annual European Public Health Conference in November, EUPHA is also proud to support smaller, theme-specific conferences. For 2014, we are supporting:

- The 11th International conference on Urban Health (ICUH2014), 4-7 March, Manchester, United Kingdom;
- The European Conference on Migrant and Ethnic Minority Health, 11-12 April, Granada, Spain; and

Last November, the EUPHA Governing Board discussed the first draft of our new strategy for the period 2014–20. We received positive feedback on this draft strategy in which EUPHA will retain its focus on capacity, knowledge and policy building, which have led to visible successes in the recent past. In addition, EUPHA will prepare the next generation of public health and health services professionals for their leadership role in health policy for the years ahead. The draft strategy will be further elaborated in the coming months, with input from our members. In November 2014, the strategy will be presented to the EUPHA Governing Board for official approval.

We look forward to another productive year with the continuous support of our members.

Dineke Zeegers Paget
EUPHA Executive Director

MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR: PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECTS OF MIGRATION

Migration is a global phenomenon and WHO estimates that 1 in every 30 people in the world is a migrant. The pace and scope of migration are predicted to accelerate in the next few decades as a result of climate change, which may displace an additional 250 million so-called
environmental refugees by 2050. Mass population movements have emerged as a major risk factor for both chronic and infectious diseases, reducing migrants’ access to timely and affordable health care. People who are displaced either in their own countries or across international borders risk food insecurity and malnutrition. Migration in the WHO European Region is a structural phenomenon that poses specific challenges to health systems.

Countries cannot afford not to address the public health aspects of migration. WHO has the responsibility of assisting Member States in strengthening their public health capacity to prepare for and respond to influxes of migrants. In the 2008 World Health Assembly resolution WHA61.17 on the health of migrants, Member States agreed on the need for migrant-sensitive health policies and systems, and equitable access to services. Much still needs to be done to implement the resolution. The continuous influxes of migrants to Europe from across the Mediterranean Sea constitute reminders to all of us.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe started a 3-year project to establish a platform that Member States could use to strengthen their health systems. Guided by the new European health policy framework, Health 2020, the WHO project on the public health aspects of migration in Europe addresses health inequalities and promotes people-centred health systems.

Now, when Europe has so many migrants, is the time to develop policies, strategies and plans to improve their health, both in crises and as a matter of routine. The involvement of all segments of society is essential, and the health sector should have a leading role.

Zsuzsanna Jakab
WHO Regional Director for Europe

MESSAGE FROM THE EU COMMISSIONER: DOCTORS AND PHARMACISTS REMAIN OUR BEST ALLIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

Over time, the misuse and overuse of antibiotics have led many disease-causing bacteria to become resistant to antibiotics. Taking antibiotics irresponsibly can harm a patient’s individual health, and, in addition, contributes to the spread of resistance to antibiotics, thus harming the society as a whole. We must therefore strengthen our efforts to raise public awareness about the proper use of antibiotics.

Part of the European strategy against antimicrobial resistance is based on monitoring levels of public use of and knowledge about antibiotics across Europe. A first Eurobarometer survey was commissioned to that end, in 2009. The latest survey, conducted in 2012, shows there has been a positive, if modest, evolution since 2009. For example, 35% of respondents say that they have taken antibiotics in the past year, as compared with 40% in the 2009 survey. We have also observed a 2% decrease in the number of people taking antibiotics to treat the flu.

One particularly compelling finding has emerged from our latest survey: almost all respondents (94%) would choose to see a medical professional to get trustworthy information about antibiotics, and they would primarily opt to see a doctor. In view of the fact that 49% of the European population still do not know that antibiotics are inefficient to treat viruses, I can only underline the guiding role that general practitioners have in advising their patients on the most appropriate course of action. As gatekeepers, pharmacists also play an important role in promoting appropriate use of antibiotics. However, when it comes to dispensing practices, figures indicate that a persistent minority of patients (3%) still get antibiotics over the counter, despite the fact that they should only be delivered on prescription in the EU.

Since 2008, the European Antibiotic Awareness Day has provided a platform for national campaigns to promote the prudent use of antibiotics. This year’s theme is ‘Everyone’s responsible’. So today I wish to call on all health care providers in the front line, such as doctors and pharmacists, to provide the right advice about antibiotics.

Tony Borg
European Commissioner for Health and Consumers

SEVENTH EUROPEAN PUBLIC HEALTH CONFERENCE—‘MIND THE GAP: REDUCING INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE’

This year’s European Public Health Conference will be held from 19 to 22 November at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow, Scotland, UK. The theme of the conference was chosen to encourage a discussion on how European countries can not just promote the health of the public but also can reduce inequalities in health and health care. Plenary sessions are organized on the following subthemes:

- Inequalities in the population: large-scale interventions
- Equity across the European region: the European Action Plan for strengthening public health services and capacity
- Communicable and non-communicable diseases: old challenges, novel solutions
- Marginalized groups: migrant and ethnic minority health
- Looking to the future: translating evidence into policy

The conference web pages are continuously updated at www.eupha.org/Glasgow2014. Abstract and workshop submission will open on 1 February 2014. If you have ideas for a workshop, a preconference or an exhibition stand at the conference, please contact us at office@eupha.org.

EPH Conference Office