

Summary

Evening reception “Newborn Health Reloaded. Shaping our babies’ future”

27 November 2018

Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union

On 27 November 2018, an evening reception on “Newborn Health Reloaded. Shaping our babies’ future”, under the patronship of Prof. Dr Angelika Niebler, Member of the European Parliament, and organised by the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants (EFCNI), was kindly hosted by the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union in Brussels.

The evening event aimed at bringing together key stakeholders and members of the European Standards of Care for Newborn Health project in preparation of the launch of the European Standards of Care for Newborn Health in the European Parliament on the following day, and at discussing key requirements of neonatology of the future.

Barbara Schretter, Director of the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union, warmly welcomed the guests in the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria in the heart of Brussels. She was pleased to host this evening event in the historic building of the Representation, the formally medical “Institut Pasteur” and was happy to provide a forum to an interdisciplinary exchange on the need of standards in newborn health across Europe.

Prof. Dr Angelika Niebler, Member of the European Parliament and patron of EFCNI, was equally delighted welcome the guests. She stressed the importance of the project as well as its meaning for Europe. She was deeply impressed by the realization of this unique project, the exemplary cross-disciplinary collaboration and strong commitment and support of so many individuals and organisations.

Silke Mader, Chairwoman and Co-Founder of EFCNI thanked Barbara Schretter, Prof. Dr Angelika Niebler, the presenter Sibylle Bassler who guided through the evening, as well as all the speakers. She particularly thanked the about 220 involved healthcare experts and parent representatives who voluntarily contributed to the development of the European Standards of Care for Newborn Health in more than 25,000 working hours. She also honoured the support by the project team, the various industry partners and the high number of supporting organisations. Looking back to her own experiences of preterm birth and considering the many personal destinies of families affected by preterm birth, she was proud to now present the results of this milestone project which aims at improving the lives of about 700,000 babies in Europe and even more worldwide every year. Introducing the background of the project, Silke Mader also highlighted that preterm birth rates differ widely within Europe due to existing differences regarding healthcare. The newly developed standards aim at addressing these disparities by improving the care of preterm babies, covering the whole spectrum of newborn health. The uniqueness of the project, as being initiated by parents, and parents being involved in every single step of developing the standards, was highlighted. Silke Mader was proud to announce that the [Lancet Child & Adolescent Health published an editorial](#) on the European Standards of Care for Newborn Health project. She concluded that the next step after the launch of the standards will be to ensure their implementation, with the goal: “Every baby born no matter where, will have the best start in life”.

In his following keynote speech, Prof. Dr Matthias Keller from the Children’s Hospital Dritter Orden, Passau, pointed out that it was now time to act and the standards now need to be translated into daily practice. Following the principle of “The best way to predict the future is to shape the future” (quote by Willy Brandt), he gave a best practice example of how this could look like, reporting from his

experiences in implementing family-integrated care via the so called NeoPass programme as a possible pathway for clinical practice in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) of the Children's Hospital Dritter Orden in Passau, Germany. This has demonstrably resulted in a significant decline in neonatal mortality and complication rates such as retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD) or necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) below the German average. The data also showed that involving parents in the care for their children is not a risk factor, but rather had a protective influence. As key factors for success, Prof. Dr Matthias Keller named the need to focus on one common goal, to guarantee common action of staff, politicians, healthcare professionals, nurses, hospital administrators, as well as to focus on processes, needs, interfaces and collaboration.

In the following panel discussion Prof. Dr Matthias Keller, Silke Mader, MEP Prof. Dr Angelika Niebler, Monique Oude Reimer from the Erasmus University Medical Center Rotterdam, Dr Dietmar Schlembach from the Vivantes Clinic Neukölln, Berlin and Dr Martin Weber from the World Health Organization (WHO), Copenhagen elaborated on the prerequisites for the neonatology of the future. Although a lot has been achieved so far in neonatal health, there still remain country-specific challenges, like the prevention of preterm birth, parental presence in the NICUs or the improvement of long-term follow-up. Prof. Dr Angelika Niebler affirmed her willingness to advocate for preterm children and their families by putting their cause on the European agenda.

Monique Oude Reimer stressed that specialised education and training for nurses urgently needs to be provided all over Europe and that, next to providing more specialist nurses and a higher recognition of their work, individualised and family-integrated care approaches must be comprehensively implemented.

Dr Martin Weber from the WHO gave an overview on the status quo and the reasons for healthcare differences in maternal and newborn care in Europe. He stressed that mind-changes are a prerequisite for improvements. The new standards need to be engrained in the different countries, ensuring a continuous quality improvement for a better care practice. Mr Weber reminded of the fact that for a long time, newborn care was a neglected topic within healthcare. He therefore highly acknowledged the importance of patient advocacy groups to achieve a sustainable change. He also provided an update on the achievements of the Every Newborn Action Plan by the WHO that mainly focuses on the African and Asian region. For Europe, one of his major concerns is that breastfeeding rates are extremely low and that the identification of babies at risk should be improved.

Dr Dietmar Schlembach also confirmed the importance to restructure perinatal care, identify women at risk early, provide adequate counselling. He also pointed out that parents likewise have to follow the advice of their doctors, e.g. by delivering in a unit that may not be the closest, but the best one for their case. Prof. Dr Matthias Keller reported from the process of rebuilding his unit at the Children's Hospital Dritter Orden, Passau and of facilitating a mind-change by providing a common vision and by including all hospital staff.

In questions from the audience, it was supported that on one side, big achievements have been made, and that a mind-shift towards integrating families in neonatal care has been taking place. On the other side, many hospitals are struggling with limited resources, especially in the care of preterm or ill babies, the lack of skilled workers, and paradigms that have to overcome by different stakeholders. It was also discussed that the industry is a very important partner in the care provided for these patients and that the support of industry if needed for improvement and innovation. It was suggested to foster the partnership between scientific societies and the industry. From the point of views of healthcare societies, it was also stressed that many changes have been achieved through a regionalisation of care and that future newborn care is not about competition, but much more about collaboration between hospitals and further stakeholders.