

Dr Marco Greco
President, European Patients' Forum

Dr Stella Kyriakides
Commissioner for Health and Food Safety,
European Commission
Via email: cab-kyriakides-contact@ec.europa.eu

Brussels, 27 March 2020

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

I am writing on behalf of the European Patients' Forum membership of 74 patient organisations.

The World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 a pandemic. It is now affecting all countries and all communities. As you are aware, patients with chronic diseases – numbering at least 150 million in the EU – are among the most vulnerable, as many are at much higher risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19, but also because patients are directly exposed to any disruptions in healthcare provision.

The European Patients' Forum as an umbrella organisation representing patients across Europe and across diseases, is monitoring the situation very closely and providing information updates to our community.⁽¹⁾

We appreciate the efforts that you and your colleagues are undertaking during this extremely challenging period. We would like to assure you that our organisation is ready to collaborate and support European efforts to control the pandemic.

Our membership includes patient organisations and advocates who have expertise in patient and community engagement and empowerment, development of health literacy-friendly, patient-relevant information, health service improvement, policy and research. Their experience and perspective are, we believe, an asset both to the Commission and the Member States.

Patient organisations are connected to their grass-roots communities and can support the healthcare services in ensuring information flows and good communication, as well as

providing invaluable peer support, and developing creative solutions for patients' continuing access to care at a time when crisis threatens to overwhelm them – for example by using telemedicine. Anecdotal evidence is emerging on how patients are served via virtual consultations, email communications and automatic prescription renewals, for example, but to date we have not seen a systematic collection or sharing of such “best practices”. This is one area, among many, where the European Commission can support Member States, with the involvement of patient organisations, building on EU projects to date on this topic.

We also wish to highlight the challenges patient organisations are facing during these times, due to meetings and other activities being cancelled and the resulting loss of financial resources. A recognition of these issues from the European Commission and the Member States would be welcome, and we are in readiness to discuss potential support measures to enable patient organisations to survive and continue their activities.

The COVID-19 crisis is rapidly revealing gaps and weaknesses in our health systems, potentially putting the cohesion and unity of the European Union to a test. We believe that, once the immediate pandemic situation has been overcome, attention must be turned towards enhanced European collaboration for strengthening health systems. Health is not only a national matter – it is an urgent European and global health policy priority. Patient organisations are vital stakeholders in future policy discussions, and EPF is fully committed to working with you on defining a new way forward.

In the meantime, we wish you much strength in the difficult weeks and months to come and look forward to our continuing positive and trusted relationship.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marco Greco', written in a cursive style.

Marco Greco
EPF President

Cc. Ms Anne Bucher, Director-General for Health and Food Safety, European Commission