

**EUROPEAN CONFEDERATION OF
PRIMARY CARE PAEDIATRICIANS**

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Sonnenweg 7
79618 Germany
grhuss@t-online.de

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Rheinfelden, 27.6.2015

Open letter to the French government

Alarming news have reached us from France about a new 2015 health law, which probably will affect the quality of health services for children and adolescents. One paragraph in this law will regulate the binding choice of a personal (family) doctor for every patient, now including children between birth and 16 years. Currently most of the parents in France have both a General Practitioner (GP) and a Primary Care Paediatrician (PCP). They choose the physician whom they want to see with their children each time they have a problem.

The possibility for patients to choose their own doctor is an expression of a universal and public health care system and the basis for a good response of a primary care system to the needs of the citizens. Parents usually know best what kind of support they need from their primary care doctor. In case of a serious problem, they might want to see the paediatrician immediately, also in case they have a chronically ill child. Parents should be able to choose the doctor for their child without restraint.

A strict binding choice of a personal (family) doctor who acts a permanent gatekeeper from birth to adolescence will possibly have serious consequences:

1. It will create a social divide in primary health care:

- By penalizing parents, who want a joint follow-up for their children (for geographical reasons or because of a lack of PCPs in some rural areas).

- By increasing out of pocket- expenditure in case that the GP was chosen as family doctor and the child consults the paediatrician without a letter of referral from the GP. People that are more affluent would be able to afford the free choice, change of the provider and better medicine than parents with low incomes.

2. It will establish difficulties in Emergency Primary care for children and adolescents. Currently PCPs examine in their daily activity over 50% of all paediatric emergencies. In case of limited access to the PCP children will approach hospitals and overload paediatric hospital emergency departments.contd.

Page 2 Letter

3. If more children and adolescents are attended by GPs there will be a real danger that this will deteriorate the quality of care. PCPs have comparative advantages as more adequate and more cost- effective providers. Paediatricians have a much longer and comprehensive training field of Primary and Community Paediatrics than GPs. They are better prepared to care for children in the community. Moreover there is sufficient evidence that they perform better. They are more compliant with evidence- based- guidelines and make more cost-efficient use of diagnostic and therapeutic measures.

We as a representative body for more than 25000 Primary Care Paediatricians from 18 European countries are seriously concerned about the new health law 2015 in France that will limit the free access to the paediatrician in primary care and would bring disadvantages for children, adolescents, families and PCPs in France.

Many countries in Europe have a mixed system where PCPs and GP work alongside in paediatric teams complementing their knowledge and abilities at the best purpose of their patients. In most European countries, the majority of children are regularly attended in first instance by their paediatrician who provides the entry into the health system for all need and problems, acute and chronic care, prevention of disease, health education, vaccination and well- baby clinics. The paediatrician coordinates and integrates child care. Parents are well guided and satisfied.

Governments and health planers should put children- welfare and -wellbeing as top priority in their agenda. We paediatricians are advocates for children and will hold governments accountable to ratify and implement all aspects of the [United Nations](#) Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention recognizes the right of all children to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health with emphasis on the development of primary health care (article 24 UNCRCh)

We support the French paediatricians and their associations AFPA and SNPF in their protest against the new health law 2015 and hope the law will be modified permitting the free choice of the provider for children and adolescents.

With kind regards



Dr. Gottfried Huss MPH, President

on behalf of the Executive Bureau and the Executive Committee