

Preface

Dear INIC09 participants!

Demographic and technological developments pose unprecedented challenges for health care systems over the next decades. The task of providing appropriate, high quality and cost-effective medical treatment is certain to be demanding. To make the job even more difficult, there is also a need for more health promotion. We know that the chances of staying healthy are below the norm for economically and socially disadvantaged persons and that processes within the health care system further aggravate this situation. Against this background, health care planners and decision-makers have to make massive efforts to improve the health status of all citizens, independent of their income, education level and profession.

On the one hand, it will be necessary to optimize the medical treatment. This can be done by improving the coordination of therapeutic interventions for the chronically ill—e.g. by disease management for diabetes—and by special forms of care for multi-morbid patients. In accordance with international trends, an Austrian study found that 1.4% of the insured cause 25% of the costs incurred by the health insurance funds and 21% of the insured cause about 80% of the costs. Hence, case-and-care management are very important starting points for improving patient treatment and management. Improving the quality of care for very ill patients has to be a priority within this setting. And it has to be emphasized that focusing on quality will optimize costs.

The improved integration of therapeutic interventions has to provide measurable results for patients. This means additional high quality years of life with a high degree of autonomy. The improvement of therapeutic processes has to be supported by organizational integration on the provider's side and on the management side of health care. In many health care systems, however, much remains to be done on that account.

On the other hand, it will be very important to give more prominence to health promotion and prevention within health care policy to counteract the increase of chronic diseases.

We are very happy that this year's INIC conference is being held in Vienna, which gives us the chance to draw more attention to the topic of integrated care. It is most gratifying that the Competence Center 'Integrated Care' of the Viennese sickness fund performs valuable work for the Austrian health care system. The future, however, will require an increased effort in all countries to cope with the upcoming challenges.

I am sure that the conference will provide you with interesting and fruitful discussions and sustainable results, and I would like to wish you all a very successful INIC09!

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