

Statement of the Council of European Dentists (CED)

Amendments needed to the recognition of the Professional Qualifications Directive

The Council of European Dentists (CED) is the representative organization of the dental profession in the European Union, representing over 330,000 practicing dentists from 32 national dental associations in 30 European countries. Established in 1961 to advise the European Commission on matters relating to the dental profession, the CED (at that time called the Dental Liaison Committee) issued as one of its first actions a position on the mutual recognition of dental qualifications in Europe. Today, more than fifty years later, the CED is again focusing on the same issue.

In December 2011, the European Commission published its proposal for amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, also referred to as the Professional Qualifications Directive. The Commission presented the proposal as being aimed at simplifying the procedures connected to recognition, increasing mobility of professionals within the European Union and stimulating economic growth.

The CED, which was involved in the evaluation process preceding the Commission's proposal, welcomed changes to the Professional Qualifications Directive, particularly those meant to enhance confidence and facilitate automatic recognition. However, in the coming months, the CED will propose a number of amendments designed to ensure that the new recognition system maintains the high standards of dental training and dental treatments and that it guarantees patient safety.

Worried about deadlines

One of the most publicized parts of the Commission's proposal is the European Professional Card. The CED, which had been sceptical about the benefits of an obligatory physical professional card for all dentists, welcomes the proposal for an electronic certificate created via the Internal Market Information system, voluntary for individual dentists. The CED is, however, concerned about the newly shortened deadlines for competent authorities under the electronic system. According to the proposal, the home member state must take a decision within two

weeks, and the host member state within one month, from receiving a complete application for recognition of professional qualifications. After the deadline expires, in the absence of a reply, the card is automatically validated and the professional qualification recognized. The CED believes that these deadlines should be extended as failure to do so might risk patient safety.

The Professional Qualifications Directive establishes the principle of automatic recognition for a small number of so-called sectoral professions, including dentists, and sets out the minimum conditions for their training. For dentists, the minimum duration of training that could still benefit from automatic recognition is currently expressed only in terms of years (five years), potentially opening the door to automatic recognition of diplomas awarded after part-time or weekend courses of dental studies. To maintain an acceptable standard of dental education, without jeopardizing patient safety and the delivery of healthcare, the CED suggests that the duration of training should also be expressed in terms of hours (5,000 hours). This is already the case for doctors and nurses.

Concerns on the practicability

The CED believes that dentists should speak the language of the country they practice in, both to enable communication between the practitioner and the patient and to ensure that the dentist is aware of the national laws, professional regulations and ethical principles according to which he or she is expected to



Dr Wolfgang Doneus

practice. As a result, the CED welcomes the recognition by the European Commission of the need to clarify the conditions under which the migrating healthcare professionals' language knowledge may be tested. However, the CED is concerned that the relevant provisions in the Commission's proposal, which create different procedures for professionals affiliated to the national health care system and for self-employed professionals, and require a request from the representative national patients' organizations, are too complicated to work in practice. Rather, the competent authorities should as a matter of principle have the right to carry out language checks of all healthcare professionals.

The CED does not agree that the principle of partial access, newly introduced in the proposal, should apply to healthcare professions. According to this principle, professionals whose profession does not exist in the host member state, would still be able to practise and have "partial access" to the more highly qualified profession, as long as his or her activities are part of the other profession. The CED is convinced that the logic of the internal market and the idea of standardizing professions across the European Union cannot be applied to the health sector where patient safety and public health considerations are at stake.

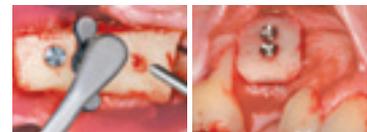
The CED has been in favour of an alert mechanism for healthcare professionals that would allow competent authorities to share information about dentists no longer allowed to practise in one of the European Union countries. However, taking into account the possibility of appeals with suspensory effect and the negative impact that such an alert could have on the career of a professional if the decision is revoked, the CED supports only notifying other competent authorities when the decision becomes legally binding and when the professional is permanently prohibited from practising.

The discussions about the Professional Qualifications Directive have already started in the European Parliament, where the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) committee will take the lead. The draft report by the committee's rapporteur on this issue, MEP *Bernardette Vergnaud*, is expected to be published in September of this year and the final vote in the Parliament's plenary is tentatively scheduled for January 2013. The CED will continue its involvement in the legislative process through contacts with the members of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, to achieve the best possible document for the benefit of European dentists and their patients.

Dr Wolfgang Doneus
President of the Council of European Dentists ■



Aesculap® Dental Bone Fixation



Easy Handling – Excellent Results

Bone Fixation Forceps:

- Delicate and adaptable working tips
- Universal application ➔ upper and lower jaw

Screws:

- Highest stability
- Smallest possible screw head
- Biocompatible
- Easy removal of residues

B | BRAUN
SHARING EXPERTISE

Aesculap AG | Am Aesculap-Platz | D-78532 Tuttlingen | Germany
Phone +49 7461 95-2496 | Fax +49 7461 78980
eMail dental@aesculap.de | www.aesculap-dental.com