
PRESS RELEASE

Role for Primary Eye Care Emphasised at Europe-wide Forum on Men's Health

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ECOO representative Mark Nevin features in a European Men's Health Forum report on men's access to primary care services across Europe.

The report, published this week, looks at the contributing factors that lead to poor health outcomes for men in the 27 member countries of the European Union. ECOO was invited to ensure that optometry and optics could input to improving the men's health, and in particular their eye health.

The report focuses on why men approach primary care providers so much later than women, and examines methods for engaging men in their own healthcare and building "male-friendly" systems that encourage them to do so. From their base in the community, opticians and optometrists are well positioned to make health interventions with men with a range of conditions, including diabetes and high blood pressure, that they might otherwise avoid visiting their doctor or pharmacist about.

Nevin presented at the original roundtable event in June on the rising levels of visual problems amongst both men and women across Europe, driven largely by the ageing population. He outlined that since men are living longer, more are experiencing age related eye problems, which have huge personal, economic and social costs. 50% of sight loss is preventable through early detection and treatment, and eliminating preventable sight loss would save €25 billion a year in the UK alone.

Nevin also noted that sight checks are a good opportunity to address broader health issues related to eye health such as smoking cessation, hypertension, and diabetes which is the leading cause of adult blindness. He said that to address the sight loss challenge we need to develop innovative pathways facilitating prompt access to care, and make primary eye care integral to healthcare systems across Europe.

Professor Ian Banks from the EMHF said 'We need to dispel the myths about men's health and every contact with them counts. All community providers have a role in improving men's health, including optometrists and opticians and I am delighted that ECOO could participate in the debate.'

Mark Nevin, speaking on behalf of ECOO, said: "Optometry and optics are an invaluable community resource and key drivers for improving public health. We would like to thank the EMHF for the opportunity to attend the roundtable. Through our joint efforts, eye health is increasingly recognised as a major health challenge across Europe. Our role through ECOO is to ensure that we keep eye health high on the European agenda and to work with our colleagues across primary and secondary care to improve access to essential healthcare services."

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Notes to editors

1. The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) is the European organisation which represents the interests of optometrists and opticians from 27 countries. It aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.
2. Other speakers at the event, and featured in the report, included: Dr Isabel de la Mata, Principal Adviser for Public Health, Directorate SANCO - Health and Consumers, European Commission; Dr Steve Mowle, Vice Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) UK; John Chave, Secretary General, Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU); Dr Bert-Jan deBoer, GP and Assistant Professor, Department of General Practice at the University Medical Centre Utrecht and European Society for Sexual Medicine (ESSM); Valerie van Gulck, Board Member, Federation of Occupational Health Nurses within the European Union (FOHNEU) ; and Professor Kenneth Eaton, Chair, The Platform for Better Oral Health in Europe.
3. A full copy of the final report is available at <http://www.ecoo.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/EMHF-Roundtable-Report-2013.pdf>