

Response to

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Response to: Overly optimistic picture of current state of cross-border patient care in 'Going the extra mile' by Beuken JA, Verstegen DML, Dolmans D, et al

As authors, we were pleased to read the elaborate comments in the correspondence from Kringos *et al*¹ regarding our study, 'Going the extra mile—cross-border patient handover in a European border region: qualitative study of healthcare professionals' perspectives'.² We were happy to read that we succeeded in articulating the need for attention to professionals' role in cross-border healthcare, especially with regards to the identified challenges (information transfer, differences in task division and education, use of tools and protocols and cultural and language differences). Kringos and colleagues make some excellent points. We would like to elaborate on some of the comments, namely the argued overestimation of cross-border healthcare use, the limited attention for patients and the modesty of proposed actions.

OVERESTIMATION OF CROSS-BORDER HEALTH CARE USE

Of the overall European population, only a small proportion receives cross-border healthcare. This is, however, different in border regions. Our study was set in a region where three large hospitals are situated in three different countries within a radius of 25 km. We purposefully selected three settings in this region, where collaboration was explicit. We agree that these settings might not be representative for Europe at large. However, we believe the growing emphasis on cross-border healthcare, and the need for efficient use of resources and expertise

in border-regions³ will eventually lead to increases in cross-border care. Therefore, it is important to study current experiences and potential ways to improve cross-border care.

PATIENT PERSPECTIVE

We agree with the correspondents that our study does not focus on the burden that cross-border healthcare puts on patients. Some of our respondents did report on patient involvement in the decision to cross borders for healthcare, but this was not perceived as a main subject, nor a challenge, for cross-border healthcare. It is possible that our respondents, healthcare professionals, are not always aware of burdens typically experienced by patients, such as arranging prior authorisation or reimbursement afterwards.

Since we feel there should be more attention for patients in the complexity of cross-border healthcare, we are currently finalising a study that focuses solely on their unique perspective. Although we agree that citizens and patients should have the ability to initiate, and be involved in, cross-border healthcare, we warn for inappropriate amounts of responsibility that sometimes seems to be expected of these patients. We believe healthcare professionals' awareness of cross-border healthcare is an important facilitator for patient involvement.

MODESTY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

We agree that there is a need to support cross-border care on a European level. Supportive directives and regulations, as formulated by the European Committee, are important facilitators to reach agreements between neighbouring countries and nuance differences in local policies. However, as articulated in special report number 07/2019,⁴ these directives and regulations require translation from politics to clinical practice, and further elaboration on a local

level to support both professionals and patients. What we have learnt from the interviews, is that a one-size-fits-all solution does not exist. In clinical practice, there are large differences between unplanned and planned cross-border care, and between specific settings (eg, depending on languages spoken, diversity in task-descriptions, or the presence of professionals with clinical experience in different countries). Therefore, we argue that getting together to discuss challenges and fitting strategies for improvement, is an important link in the chain of optimising cross-border healthcare. Interaction between policy and practice will certainly enrich these discussions and fortify the outcomes, and should definitely be part of future supportive efforts.

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