

Strengthening of occupational health promotion by the German Prevention Health Care Act

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All countries are faced with the problem of the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCD): implement prevention strategies effectively, keep up the momentum with long term benefits at the individual and the population level, at the same time tackling health inequalities. The affordability of therapy and care including innovative therapies is going to be one of the key public health priorities in the years to come.

Germany has taken in the prevention and control of NCDs. Germany's health system has a long history of guaranteeing access to high-quality treatment through universal health care coverage. Through their membership people are entitled to prevention and care services maintaining and restoring their health as well as long term follow-up.

Like in many other countries general life expectancy has been increasing steadily in Germany. Currently, the average life expectancy is 83 and 79 years in women and men, respectively. The other side of the coin is that population aging is strongly associated with a growing burden of disease from NCDs. Already over 70 percent of all deaths in Germany are caused by four disease entities: cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes. These diseases all share four common risk factors: smoking, alcohol abuse, lack of physical activity and overweight. At the same time, more and more people become long term survivors of disease due to improved therapy and care.

The German Government and public health decision makers are aware of the need for action and have responded by initiating and implementing a wide spectrum of activities. One instrument by strengthening primary prevention is the Prevention Health Care Act. Its overarching aim is to prevent NCDs before they can manifest themselves by strengthening primary prevention and health promotion in different settings. One of the main emphasis of the Prevention Health Care Act is the occupational health promotion at the workplace.

Key words: *non-communicable diseases; prevention strategies; public health; statutory health insurance system; life expectancy; risk factors; primary prevention; occupational health*

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Усиление мер в сфере гигиены труда в соответствии с немецким Законом о профилактическом здравоохранении

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Все страны сталкиваются с проблемой профилактики и борьбы с неинфекционными заболеваниями (НИЗ): необходимо эффективнее применять стратегии профилактики, поддерживать положительную динамику состояния здоровья на уровне отдельных лиц и населения, одновременно решая проблему неоднородности его качества. Доступность медицинского обслуживания и ухода за больными, включая инновационные методы лечения, станет одним из приоритетных направлений общественного здравоохранения будущих лет.

Германия приняла меры по профилактике и борьбе с НИЗ. Система здравоохранения Германии имеет давнюю историю обеспечения высококачественного лечения посредством всеобщего охвата медицинской помощью. Население может получить доступ к услугам по профилактике и уходу, направленным на поддержание и восстановление здоровья, а также на долгосрочное наблюдение.

Как и во многих других странах, общая продолжительность жизни в Германии неуклонно растет. В настоящее время средняя продолжительность жизни составляет 83 года у женщин и 79 лет — у мужчин. Однако старение населения тесно связано с растущим бременем болезней, обусловленных НИЗ. Более 70% всех смертей в Германии вызваны четырьмя заболеваниями: сердечно-сосудистыми, хроническими респираторными, раком и диабетом. Данные болезни имеют четыре общих фактора риска: курение, злоупотребление алкоголем, недостаток физической активности и избыточный вес. Благодаря улучшению медицинского обслуживания и ухода наблюдается снижение заболеваемости.

Правительство Германии, а также лица, уполномоченные принимать решения в области общественного здравоохранения, осознают необходимость активных действий, поэтому инициировали и осуществили широкий спектр мероприятий. Одним из инструментов пропаганды первичной профилактики является Закон о профилактической медицинской помощи. Его главная цель состоит в том, чтобы предотвратить НИЗ за счет усиления мер по первичной профилактике и укреплению здоровья. Одним из основных положений Закона о профилактической медицинской помощи является пропаганда гигиены труда на рабочем месте.

Ключевые слова: *неинфекционные заболевания; профилактические стратегии; здравоохранение; система обязательного медицинского страхования; ожидаемая продолжительность жизни; факторы риска; первичная профилактика; гигиена труда*

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Health-challenges in Germany. Countries differ considerably in the way they have set up and run their health care systems. Despite this heterogeneity, ultimately, we, the global community, are all in the same boat when it comes to the big issues in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCD): How do we implement prevention strategies effectively, keeping up the momentum with long term benefits at the individual and the population level, at the same time tackling health inequalities. How do we deal with the challenges that are becoming ever more complex when treating and caring for NCD patients and their co-morbidities? The affordability of therapy and care including innovative therapies is going to be one of the key public health priorities in the years to come. What's more, the concepts of survivorship, quality of life and fostering health literacy in patients have to be an integral part of the provision of comprehensive care.

Germany has taken in the prevention and control of NCDs. The strategic decisions guiding public health policy to tackle these issues are complex and not easy to take. Many of them, inevitably, have to be based on value judgements we have to agree on as a society.

Germany's health system has a long and proud history of guaranteeing access to high quality treatment through universal health care coverage. More than 90 percent of the population in Germany are covered by the statutory health insurance system, and the premiums are adjusted individually according to the income of insured. Through their membership people are entitled to prevention and care services maintaining and restoring their health as well as long term follow-up. Since its introduction in 1883 the guiding principle has been solidarity among its insured members. The solidarity principle guarantees that each insured person receives service from statutory health insurance, free at the point of access, without up-front payments on the part of the insured. Care is provided regardless of income, premium paid, or place of residence and regardless of the disease risk profile an insured person may have.

Like in many other countries general life expectancy has been increasing steadily in Germany. Currently, the average life expectancy is 83 and 79 years in women and men, respectively. According to conservative projections, by 2060 women will live up to the age of 89 years, men will reach 85 years of age. This is a very positive trend. The other side of the coin is that population ageing is strongly associated with a growing burden of disease from NCDs. Already over 70 percent of all deaths in Germany are caused by four disease entities: cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes. These diseases all share four common risk factors: smoking, alcohol abuse, lack of physical activity and overweight. At the same time, more and more people become long term survivors of disease due to improved therapy and care. By now, for example, there are an estimated total of 4 million people in Germany have ever been diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lives.

The German Government and public health decision makers are aware of the need for action and have responded by initiating and implementing a wide spectrum of activities. One instrument by strengthening primary prevention is the Prevention Health Care Act.

The German Prevention Health Care Act. In July 2015 the Prevention Health Care Act came into force in Germany.

After more than ten years of discussion three unsuccessful attempts, the Prevention Health Care Act passed by the German parliament. The legislation is addressing primarily the different mandatory branches of social insurance (due to the federal system, no competence for legislation addressing prevention directly, but Federal Government has jurisdiction over social insurance). This piece of legislation is dedicated almost exclusively to the area of primary prevention.

Its overarching aim is to prevent NCDs before they can manifest themselves by strengthening primary prevention and health promotion in different settings, in particular where the people live, learn and work — in nursery schools, schools, in the workplace and nursing homes — focusing strongly on common risk factors and health inequalities. The act takes a disease unspecific approach and aims to strengthen people's health resources and potential. Our experience shows that a disease-unspecific approach, multisectoral and integrated strategies that focus on primary prevention and health promotion seem to be most effective and efficient.

The Prevention Health Care Act relies on the cooperation of those involved in prevention and health promotion. Alongside the statutory health insurance, the statutory pension insurance and the statutory accident insurance, the statutory long-term-care-insurance and the private health insurance will also be involved. Within the context of a National Prevention Conference, the social security institutions, with the participation, especially of the Federal Government, the Laender, the local authorities, the Federal Employment Agency and the social partners, are identifying joint goals and agreeing on a joint approach. This agreement is the heart of the National Prevention Strategy. Since 2015 it exists for the first time in Germany.

Since 2016 the health insurance and the long-term-care insurance funds have to invest 500 million euros for prevention and health promotion every year.

The Act also provides for the continued development of the existing health checks and screening tests for the early detection of diseases among children, young persons and adults. The checks should raise an increases attention to individual stressors and risk factors that can lead to disease. Doctors are given the possibility of issuing prevention recommendations and thus contributing to the maintenance and improvement of their patients' health.

Occupational health promotion within the framework of the Prevention Health Care Act. Another main emphasis of the Prevention Health Care Act is the occupational health promotion at the workplace. Why? Our work influences our health — in the positive and also in the negative way. A high degree of control over one's own work and new technological possibilities afford employees a greater degree of freedom in terms of decision-making, enable an increase in personal productivity and, as a result, lead to more work satisfaction. However, there is another side of this coin: the difficulty frequently experienced in separating private life from working hours, paired with the demand for constant availability can also result in increased working hours, heightened stress experiences and health complaints.

And there is another reason: In Germany we have a lack of qualified personnel. With occupational health promotion employers can express appreciation to their employed persons. And that is today an important aspect to get qualified employ-

ees. Consequently, health promoting structures in the workplace are to be more supported. Examples: healthy canteen meals, workshops on promoting healthy styles of management or courses to promote individual stress management skills among employees and also healthy operational structures, and esteeming working atmosphere and a respectful interaction to each other. But please note: For enterprises the occupational health promotion is voluntarily — as a compellent to occupational safety, which is obligatory in Germany.

Providing support particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. Especially the big companies did recognize the importance of good working conditions and integrated the occupational health promotion effectively into their corporation structures. Often, they have own departments for occupational health management. For smaller enterprises — you can just imagine for example bakeries with 5 or 6 employees — the realization of occupational health promotion is very difficult, and they need help by personal and financial support.

And so, within the Prevention Health Care Act the health insurance funds are required to offer such enterprises advice and support at joint regional coordination offices. In order to promote regional network building and cooperation with business organizations such as chambers of industry and commerce, guilds and sector associations to function as middlemen and disseminators.

The concept for the implementation of the coordination offices for occupational health promotion was drawn up by the associations of health insurance funds and they started in May 2017. If the enterprise wishes to have a consultation, the health insurance fund of choice will establish contact with the requesting enterprise within two weekdays. The individual consultation will take place by telephone or personally on site.

The dovetailing of occupational health promotion and occupational safety

In the Prevention Health Care Act we tried to create a close connection between occupational health promotion and occupational safety. By the way, the German Federal Ministry of Labour is responsible for the occupational safety and we have the responsibility for occupational health promotion. And so, both ministries worked together on this issue. There is another cooperation between the health insurance and the accident insurance in the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy. In this strategy both associations and many other players agreed common occupational safety and health targets and principles of cooperation. They apply for example to the protection and strengthening of mental health and the reduction of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Furthermore, health insurance funds have to take account the results of existing risk assessments in developing proposals to improve the health situation of employees. That means that the health insurance funds are also meant to direct their measures towards observed, specific, work-related health risks.

At first appearance occupational health promotion and occupational safety are fundamentally different. Persons involved in occupational safety are used to recording objective workplace stressors such as dust, dirt, noise or task cycle times. „Health promotioners“ look into the less measurable aspects of work such as sense of well-being or job satisfaction. Nevertheless, or for this very reason, both areas provide an excellent complement to each other and consequently enable synergy effects for working people.

Increased involvement of company doctors in occupational health promotion. As a result of the position they enjoy in enterprises, in matters regarding occupational health and safety regulations, company doctors constitute an important interface between health promotion and the maintenance of a person's employability. Owing to their responsibilities and the trust they often enjoy among the workers and staff, they are very familiar with both the employees and the company's work process. Furthermore, they have a precise knowledge of the health situation in the enterprise as well as prevention needs and potential. Consequently, company doctors can make a major contribution towards keeping employees healthy, motivated and productive thereby strengthening the enterprise's competitiveness. They are the key partner in designing and implementing measures to promote occupational health. The Prevention Health Care Act builds on these areas of activity that are incumbent on company doctors in three statutory causes:

1. Company doctors and occupational safety specialists always have to be involved at all occupational health aspects: surveying the enterprise's health status, including its risks and potentials, for developing proposals to improve the health situation and to strengthen health resources and skills as well as supporting their implementation within the enterprise. This involvement was clarified and is a result of the close relationship between occupational safety and occupational health promotion.

2. Company doctors are entitled to administer protective vaccines at the expense of the statutory health insurance funds. In the opinion of the legislator company doctors are able to contribute to raising the vaccination rates, because of their closeness to the employees. In 2017 the Central Federal Association of the Health Insurance Funds made a recommendation, a sample agreement for the administration and invoicing of vaccines against communicable diseases administered by company doctors.

3. The health insurance funds are empowered to enter into agreements with company doctors on the conduct of health examinations. The aim is to provide gainfully employed persons with low-threshold access to health examinations and to reach out to those people who seldom go to a doctor. In this regard, health examinations are to be focused more on recording individual health stressors and risk factors such as: imbalanced nutrition, lack of physical activity, smoking, alcohol abuses as well as stress. Where necessary, the examination also includes a counselling measure and recommendations for prevention courses.

The Prevention Health Care Act is based on the good cooperation of the various players in the prevention health promotion. This cooperation is not always easy to practice and also the development of the new structures takes a long time. In the summer of 2019, the Prevention Health Care Act will be documented and reviewed. With it the Prevention Conference will be presenting a Prevention Report. Based on these reports, the German parliament will discuss the theme and the Federal Ministry of Health will be advice possible further developments of the Act.

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