

RECOMMENDATION

“Offices for the Protection of National Health Service Recipients’ Rights as part of the Greek National Health System (ESY)”

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Within its jurisdiction, the Hellenic National Bioethics Commission studied the Ministerial Decision draft on “Offices for the Protection of Health Service Recipients’ Rights” sent to the Commission by the Ministry of Health.

1. The establishment of the institution in question is considered of great importance by the Commission. During the recently organized hearings of Patient Associations, the main point of concern has been the need for further information regarding patient rights and specific examples of patient rights infringement; a need depicted in the relevant Report.¹

2. The Commission believes that the main focus should be placed on the Offices operating on friendly terms with patients and their families and being able to prevent and ease any unnecessary tension that may occur in hospital environment. At the same time, the Offices should be able to provide support to doctors and nursing staff, facilitating their work, especially in their communication with patients.

¹See: Patients Associations: A report on the medical ethics issues that patients face in our country, available at <http://www.bioethics.gr/index.php/en/gnomes/703-patients-associations-a-report-on-the-medical-ethics-issues-that-patients-face-in-our-country>

However, it must be noted that previous experience from similar initiatives² is not encouraging; those efforts were either downgraded or stagnated due to lack of proper personnel training and the prevalence of bureaucratic procedures.

3. Overall, the Ministerial Decision draft is heading towards the right direction regarding the Offices' structure and operation. The Commission, wishing to contribute to the improvement of the aforementioned draft, urges for the consideration of the following:

a. The serious issues that may arise in relevance with bioethics and medical ethics can be handled by training the personnel through participation in programs of Bioethics and Medical Ethics that operate successfully in several Greek Universities (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Crete, Democritus University of Thrace etc.). The Ministry of Health and the Training Institute of the National Center of Public and Local Administration (EKDDA-INEP) can cooperate with these Universities and organize intense learning programs with duration between 100 – 120 hours, either in actual classes or virtual ones, that would provide immediate results.

b. The Offices' responsibilities should also include the support of doctors and nursing staff when they face serious ethical dilemmas regarding patient treatment. In such cases, the Offices will provide well documented reports, in accordance with the current legislation and code of medical ethics, and will ensure that patients will be treated with equitable medical practices.

c. To take advantage of the personnel's certified expertise in relevant legislation and ethics, the Offices should also be responsible for the ethical audit of research protocols that will be implemented on hospitals with active clinical research programs. Towards this end, each Office should employ two additional doctors, appointed by the hospital's scientific board. The findings of this ethical audit will be sent along with relevant requests to the National Commission for Clinical Research

² See article 57, law 2071/1992.

Ethics, facilitating its work and contributing to the completion of the ethical audit with the utmost speed and reliability. What is more, this function of the Offices would ensure that clinical research in ESY hospitals will become more obvious to the public and therefore, will encourage the development of similar initiatives and will provide patients with more thorough and relevant information, which is currently being regarded as insufficient by patient associations.

d. The implementation of a process of horizontal communication between different Offices, in order to ensure the improvement of the provided services through exchange of relevant experience and knowledge. The Hellenic National Bioethics Commission could implement this process in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the EKDDA-INEP.

e. The addition of a distinct section in the leaflets and the electronic material available to patients in order to promote their participation in research protocols, such as clinical studies.

Athens, June 16th 2016