



Call from ICU experts for ‘more funding and the right funding’ as Swine Flu onslaught nears

With European health ministers poised to hold an extraordinary meeting next Monday on the so-called swine flu virus (H1N1), the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM) has called upon ministers and the European Commission to take on board what experts say is required for the longer-term benefit of patients passing through intensive care units (ICUs) – from more technology to funding for research.

In excess of 2,180 people around the world have died from the H1N1 virus since it emerged in April, according to the World Health Organisation, with an estimated 210,000 people infected in 177 countries.

The number of confirmed swine flu cases in Europe stands at over 46,000 but, that figure will undoubtedly rise in the coming months, putting ICUs under more intense pressure than usual.

Says Paris-based Jean-Daniel Chiche, chairman of the society’s congress committee: ‘While only a small proportion of H1N1-infected patients will require ICU admission, this could potentially result in a critical care demand at the peak surge of the pandemic far in excess of what could be offered.

‘In addition, their conditions may be so acute for a couple of days that they could need very specific techniques that are not available at all hospitals. Our ability to care for severe patients may well be impaired in the period from mid-October to the end of January.’

Less than 5% of ICUs properly equipped

The situation is not helped by the fact that less than 5% of ICUs in Europe are equipped with the necessary computer technology for them to work at optimum level.

For this and other reasons, ESICM president-elect Andrew Rhodes believes the emphasis of funding by the likes of national governments and the European Commission needs to shift.

Speaking ahead of the society’s 22nd annual congress, he said: “Funding has changed in Europe in recent years. It now pays hospitals to push the maximum number of patients through the same number of beds. They get more money but, of course, it means that units are busier, patients are closer together, there’s less time to look after them and infections may get worse.”

He adds: “We also need money for major research projects to improve patient safety. That’s big bucks and can only come from institutions the size of the European Commission.”

Also, says ESICM president Rui Moreno: “If we are not funded by the likes of the Commission, we will have to go to industry for the money – and that obviously brings with it potential conflicts of interest.



As a background to the expected crisis, the H1N1 issue will be discussed at a Press conference next Tuesday 13 October as part of the congress, taking place in Vienna.

The gathering in the Austrian capital will focus on preparation for the onslaught of the virus, as well as on the signing of the landmark Patient Safety in the ICU: the Declaration of Vienna.

The press conference will centre around the above, while a reaction to the Extraordinary Meeting in Luxembourg will feature prominently.

ENDS

(Please see attached background features and Press Conference invitation)

Note to editors:

To arrange interviews or obtain tailored features and latest updates on the Declaration of Vienna, please contact our media partner Tony Mallett, on 0032 472 280 878. Email tony.mallett@gmail.com