

PRESS RELEASE

9th VALUE OF INNOVATION STRATEGIC CONFERENCE

“The time for tomorrow’s technologies is today”

Ljubljana, 13 October 2020 - “The time for tomorrow’s technologies is today” was one of the introductory thoughts expressed at the 9th Value of Innovation Strategic Conference: Health and Healthcare of the Future, organized by the Forum of international research and development pharmaceutical companies and carried out in virtual form for the first time this year. All the speakers at the conference agreed that the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of healthcare and introduction of innovations and consolidated the role of all stakeholders in the effort to continue investing in development and introducing innovations to improve the healthcare system.

This year’s onset of the coronavirus has laid bare the issues facing healthcare systems across all countries and reopened certain key questions regarding their responsiveness and adaptability in times of increased needs, their further development and new methods of organization and investment that will allow the assurance of quality healthcare for the entire population at a local and global scale. These were some of the topics discussed at today’s strategic conference organized by the Forum of international research and development pharmaceutical companies that was carried out digitally due to the current epidemiological situation.

Nataša Jenčič, President of the Forum of international research and development pharmaceutical companies noted that the pandemic has brought about trials of many healthcare innovations that are now successfully being applied to help fight the pandemic: *“Digitalization, telemedicine, supercomputers and artificial intelligence are just some of the tools that came to the forefront during the pandemic. It is therefore only right that any discussion of the future of healthcare touches on how to bring tomorrow’s technologies into healthcare today. We must not lose the momentum created by Covid-19 in the implementation of new technologies in healthcare. We must continue to work towards advancing our healthcare system and find mechanisms that enable financing for the development of new technologies and implementation of such technologies in healthcare systems and subsystems.”*

Peter Požun, National Councillor for the field of healthcare, President of the Commission for Social Security, Labour, Healthcare and the Disabled of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia believes that the Slovenian healthcare system has retained its high quality: *“It is ready and able to take care of each and every one who needs its assistance,*

regardless of circumstances. We need only allow it to perform its function and reopen it for the patients. It should not be forgotten that the Covid-19 epidemic has shown that countries with a strong and well functioning healthcare system have been coping with the epidemic much better than countries where response has been given over to private initiatives. Every one of us should therefore make sure in our respective fields that the healthcare system becomes as we want it to be - resilient and able to provide healthcare services to all persons when they need them."

Francesca Colombo, Head of the Health Department with OECD: *"We thought that we had strong healthcare systems, especially in developed countries, but now we have found that this is not completely true. The key question now is how to upgrade our healthcare systems and make them more resilient to situations such as this pandemic."* Francesca Colombo proposes increased investments in prevention and remedying inequality in access to healthcare which will strengthen the resilience of healthcare systems. She has also addressed their rigidity and the use of digital solutions: *"As we learned from the crisis, we need more flexible infrastructure that will be able to rapidly increase its capacities when a sudden shock occurs. The crisis was an opportunity for increased and wider use of digital data, digital solution and digital technologies. We must maintain this in the future."*

Data on access to the newest medicines presented by **Thomas Allvin**, Executive Director of Strategy and Healthcare Systems with the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations - EFPIA, shows that Slovenia places midpack in Europe. EFPIA supports the establishment of a high level consulting body under the auspices of the European Commission: *"A point of collaboration for all EU member countries, European institutions and all other key stakeholders, including representatives of the industry and the entire health chain, with the aim of seeking common solutions to benefit patients. Not only to assure innovations to tackle key health challenges, but also to assure equal access to these innovations for all patients in Europe."*

Marko Grobelnik, researcher of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at the Jožef Štefan Institute and Slovenia's digital spokesperson on new developments in artificial intelligence, emphasized that one of the main lessons learned in the current crisis is the need for faster action: *"We are preparing a digital twin of the country. The aim is to connect data streams from healthcare, pharmacy, economy, transport, supply chains, media, social services and the statistical office into a unified analytical model that will enable real time and high quality interpretation and forecasting of trends in the country. If we are successful, Slovenia will be the first country in the world with an effective analytical model to support further measures and steps taken by the state."*

Marjan Sušelj, Director of the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia, noted that every patient has the right to receive high quality and timely treatment. In the situation of a pandemic this right has been shifted aside somewhat by other priorities. In his opinion the healthcare budget

will need to increase in the future. Mr. Sušelj also touched upon the investments made by pharmaceutical companies in the search of a vaccine and treatment for Covid-19 and added: *“We must all focus primarily on the welfare of patients and assuring maximum accessibility, which does require sufficient funding.”*

Doroteja Novak Gosarič from the Directorate of Health Protection at the Ministry of Health said that they eagerly awaiting a cure and vaccine against the coronavirus and added: *“In this respect the co-operation and solidarity among all EU countries is essential as it is the best way to assure that we reach a cure and vaccine as fast as possible.”*

Participants of the panel discussion led by **dr. Petra Došenovič Bonča**, associate professor at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Ljubljana, agreed that the current circumstances dictate stronger cooperation at a national and international level. Participants also agreed that investments into research and development must continue and that new sources and forms of financing should be found to enable faster introduction of innovations into health systems to increase their accessibility for the benefit of patients.