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FEMS REPORT

Covid-19 pandemic numbers seem to be in a sustained descending curve in Portugal.

Nevertheless, it still weighs significantly in our National Health Service (NHS) directly and indirectly.

Current pandemic status and statistics

- After some quite extreme rising and falling in the number of cases, there was a recent 4th surge of cases, which is now clearly fading.
- Up until today (22/09/2021) we have had a total of 1.064.876 diagnosed cases of COVID 19 and 17.938 deceased (approximately 1750 deaths per million inhabitants).
- Yesterday there were 885 new cases and 5 deaths.
- We have insufficient data regarding the impact on health professionals. The latest official numbers are from more than 6 months ago and talk about 27973 health professionals infected and 19 recorded fatalities between medical doctors.

Country economic status

- After a severe impact in GDP, until the 1st trimester of 2021, the 2nd trimester brought a significant recovery with a 4.9% rise (more than double the European average).
- The EU plan of recovery is broadly delineated, but the details of implementation in the NHS are still lacking.

Government and health authorities measures

- Measures of public health protection are being progressively removed, regarding mask-wearing obligations, telework, gatherings and agglomerations, restaurants, cultural events, etc.
- Some important activities rely on the presentation of a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine certificate or a negative PCR or antigen test.
- Students returned to school, still with masks and the risk of prophylactic isolation in the event of an identified case.
- There is no limitation to the circulation between regions, and public transportations are working, almost without restrictions.
- Border control and flight limitations follow the European consensus.

Health professional reward/compensations

A supplement for health professionals "who performs, in a continuous and relevant manner, acts directly related to suspects and patients infected with Covid-19" is in place, namely a monthly supplement and a 50% increase of payment of supplemental hours in those conditions. But the criteria are so strict, that only a minority of healthcare workers benefit from these (quite meager) measures.

Regarding the difficulties that doctors and health services are going through in this pandemic

- The number of Covid-19 cases is still significant and demands special circuits and ward occupation.
- The vaccination process, which is completely dependent on NHS resources, is weighing the primary care workers, with great impact on this level of care.
- Primary Care doctors struggle to keep the minimum assistance to their patients at the same time they are mobilized to the vaccination efforts and to keep track of the non-hospitalized patients with Covid 19 or suspected.
- This translates into diagnostic delays and more complex cases arriving in Hospital Care. Treatment of "non-COVID" patients faces delays that are proving difficult to recover, even with the extraordinary effort of doctors and other professionals.

Unchanged conditions:

- There's still to be demonstrated any increase of medical doctors in NHS, which is not a surprise since there has been no improvement in working conditions, which were already quite poor even before COVID pandemics.
- It's impossible to maintain the current work rhythm, and it is imperative to attract more doctors to the Portuguese NHS.
- Portuguese Health Minister continues to refuse to meet with Medical Unions.

Vaccination

The effort of vaccination is achieving good results as Portugal leads in the percentage of vaccinated population.

The majority of the Portuguese population shows to be in favor of vaccinations and the numbers show it. About 85% of the population is already vaccinated.

There are no official data regarding healthcare workers' vaccination, but empirically we can say the vast majority of doctors favor it, and are vaccinated.

Portuguese doctors are and will keep doing their best, but unfortunately, it's proving insufficient to fully respond to this situation and its repercussions.

Both Portuguese Medical Unions and the Portuguese Medical Board continue to demand the resources necessary for the best possible outcome in this complicated situation.

Medical doctors in Portugal are exhausted and claiming for hardening the fight for their rights.

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