

The Role of Health Education in Improving Health in Europe – An Economic Perspective

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Synopsis

There are three great myths of modern education policy. The first is that a single source can provide all educational needs. The second, which reinforces the first, is that any source is wholly trustworthy and independent. And the third is that only certain types of information are educational. Every individual and every organisation has a vested interest somewhere; not just profit-making firms, but also governments and consumer groups. Individual consumers understand this and take it into account in their decisions, based on the information that confronts them. Healthcare consumers are no different, even if they may have been less resourceful in the early days of modern healthcare. There is clear evidence that an educated patient is a better patient. There is also clear evidence that this is achieved by a variety of means – whether by international, national or local health policy initiatives, voluntary sector projects, or pharmaceutical and healthcare industry advertising. Perhaps we don't often yet have the "expert patient", but we certainly do regularly witness the "inquisitive patient"; this is a positive development, even if the once-trusted professions sometimes feel otherwise. But the challenge now is to ensure that every patient becomes an inquisitive patient. Without this we are wasting time, effort, and resources and increasing inequalities rather than tackling them.