Eye care in Europe a success story – however more improvement needed to address gaps and regional inequalities, says new study

Brussels, 9 October 2013: The risk of suffering permanent blindness and visual impairment in Europe is falling. In the most successful countries, less than 3 % of people over 50 years old have their daily life restricted by sight loss. However, advances in preventing and treating sight loss are impeded by inefficient organization of care and poor access to medication. Equality gaps mean that citizens in Central and Eastern Europe remain up to three times more likely to suffer blindness or severe visual impairment than their Western counterparts.

The 2013 Euro Vision Scorecard (EVS), published today by the Health Consumer Powerhouse, compares eye care in 15 European countries. It highlights inequalities and provides positive suggestions for improving eye care. Johan Hjertqvist, President of the Health Consumer Powerhouse, said; “The EVS provides us with the welcome news that vision care in Europe is working well. Despite an ageing population, there will be no overall increase in blindness and visual impairment. However, there remains much room for improvement, with large disparities remain between countries.”

Continuous improvement in vision care is possible. The EVS identifies shortcomings that can be rectified and ways to make better care available to all sight-impaired EU citizens. A major step forward would be a consistent definition of blindness and sight impairment, something that currently varies from country to country.

In countries that excel in combating visual impairment – Denmark, Sweden, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland – cataract surgery is available without delay. Patients also have access to modern pharmaceuticals and waiting times to see an eye specialist are moderate. However, coverage of screening for diabetic eye complications varies from 30 and 90 percent.

In the south and east of the EU, the situation is poorer. The registration of impaired citizens is sporadic, there are no quality registries supporting development of efficient treatments and access to modern medicines is limited. The EVS stresses that improvement is not primarily a question of money. Instead, better reporting, registration and follow-up are needed. The EVS recommends:

- Building quality national registries for eye care in each EU country
- A uniform European definition of what blind and visually impaired means
- Screening a minimum of 80% of diabetic patients in every country annually
- Making cataract surgery available for all Europeans on demand
- Making modern eye care medication available to many more Europeans.

Join us for a webcast about the EVS, October 9, 10:00 hours CET at www.healthpowerhouse.com

For further information, a media interview, or to receive a copy of the EVS, please contact, Johan Hjertqvist, President, Health Consumer Powerhouse, info@healthpowerhouse.com, +46 70 7521899
About the EVS
The EVS has been developed by healthcare analysts Health Consumer Powerhouse Ltd., Stockholm. The Scorecard was published on October 9 to mark World Sight Day 2013. The project is supported by an unrestricted grant from Novartis AG.

About the Health Consumer Powerhouse
The Health Consumer Powerhouse (HCP) monitors and compares healthcare systems among 35 countries, including all EU member states as well as Canada. Open benchmarking improves performance. Presenting our conclusions through 50 various health consumer index editions, we provide guidance to patients and citizens, reality checks to governments and marketing opportunities to our sponsors.

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