

Health Care Leaders issue historic “Vienna Declaration” at International Congress ‘CleanMed Europe’ on Ecologically Sustainable Healthcare

NEWS RELEASE October 8, 2004

For more information: Manfred Muhlberger +43 (0)1 503 72 08-0

More than 300 health care leaders from 28 countries met in Vienna last week at the first-ever international health care conference to agree on a far-reaching platform for environmentally responsible health care. Participants represented a wide range of constituencies from hospitals and companies, to organizations such as the Vienna Hospital Association, Health Care Without Harm, the International Council of Nurses, the World Health Organisation, the Health Promoting Hospitals Network, the European Environmental Agency and UNIDO.

The Vienna Declaration of Environmental Standards for Healthcare, signed by the many of the participants, calls on health care institutions to:

- implement green procurement standards for their facilities
- replace problematic materials such as PVC, mercury and other persistent toxic chemicals with safer substitutes
- use organically grown and fair traded food in hospitals
- use energy generated from renewable sources
- reduce the consumption of materials, products, energy and water
- consider the replacement of one-way items
- introduce the reprocessing of medical products
- build and renovate hospitals using green design and healing principles
- preserve green areas of healthcare facilities
- inform all stakeholders about the environmental aspects and activities
- develop and implement comprehensive environmental policies and management programs to help healthcare institutions become leaders in sustainable practices.

Manfred Mühlberger, president of the Institute for Sustainable Healthcare in Vienna and the Clean Med Europe organizer, said, “The Vienna Declaration is a powerful step in building momentum toward mandatory environmental health standards for the health care sector. Hospitals should be leaders in our society in protecting the public from dangerous chemical exposures and other environmental threats.”

Cesta Hrdinka, Executive Director of Health Care Without Harm Europe and another key sponsor of the CleanMed Europe congress, said, “We are building the capacity in Europe to help the health care sector become leaders in choosing environmentally preferable products and technologies. Given that health care professionals take an oath to ‘do no harm,’ they are well positioned to become pioneers in both precautionary action and preventative medicine, and to drive dangerous chemicals and technologies out of hospital practices.”

Bruno Klausbruckner, Environmental Director of the Vienna Hospital Association and main partner of the CleanMed Europe congress said, “The congress had shown the high quality of environmental programmes in Austria and all around Europe and the passion of the people engaged in these activities. These projects not only reduce the environmental burdens from health care facilities but also provide other benefits like cost savings, improved worker safety or better procedures.”

Dr. Ake Wennmalm, the Environmental Director of the Stockholm County Council, said, “Health care leaders recognize that pharmaceutical products can harm the environment. In order to protect the quality of our drinking water, pharmaceutical companies need to develop drugs that are safe and biodegradable, and do not accumulate in the environment.”

In addition to organizing 20 sessions to develop a broad environmental agenda for the health care sector, 30 vendors of green technologies and products displayed their products in the hopes of capturing the new wave of green procurement occurring in hospitals.

In a separate press release, the PVC industry association complained of being excluded from showcasing their products at the Clean Med Europe congress. In rejecting the vinyl industry's inclusion in the conference, Mühlberger said that "this conference was about ushering in a new and healthy vision for the health care sector. The PVC industry has no place in the environmental future of health care."

Clean Med Europe presented awards to several hospitals across Europe that are already piloting important environmental practices and model projects. Recipients of the "Best Practice Award" were Region of Skane in Sweden for their eco-procurement initiative, the Mürrzuschlag hospital in Austria for reducing food waste and their overall environmental strategy, the new geriatric clinic Favoriten in Vienna for its architectural design, the long-term PVC-phase out strategy of the Vienna Hospital Association together with the first PVC free neonatal intensive care unit of the Glanzing children's department, the Preyer'sche children's hospital for their EMAS validated environmental management system and the related substantial environmental programmes for many years and the Lainz hospital in Vienna for their laundry reduction programme.

Many of the more than 40 projects presented at the poster exhibition clearly demonstrated the economic benefits of environmental projects. The Vienna Hospital Association calculated the possible cost savings through optimized laundry treatment, replacement of mineral with tap water, optimized waste separation and use of cleaning and washing agents. An extrapolation of the figure for all German and Austrian hospitals alone resulted in a potential savings of more than 364 millions of Euro.

###