Testimonies workshop- 16-17 juin in Madrid

Figures aren't enough to describe real life

"Testimony gives recognition and dignity to the patient" (participant)

Last June in Madrid, 27 participants from 11 European countries attended a two days' workshop on collecting testimonies in health, organized by the European Network to reduce vulnerabilities in health.

Collecting testimonies from service users and health professionals helps to communicate effectively the reality of service users we meet. They tell us about their difficulties in accessing healthcare for administrative, financial, language barriers and so many other social issues, and the influence of their *migration journey on their health status.*

A good testimony requires guidance to ensure respect and protection of the patient.

Participants had the opportunity to exchange practices for two days as well as to tackle issues such as interviewing and writing techniques based on their experiences.

The members of the European network share a vivid experience of working with communities and individuals that face multiple vulnerabilities. Their direct testimonies can act as a powerful advocacy tool and provide direct, focused evidence of the need and effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of law and policy to decrease EU wide health inequalities. Equally important, speaking out can be an important route to empowerment for the service users and an opportunity to gain control on one's life. As one participant said during the workshop *"patients [seen by MdM or partners] want changes"*. Another one added the importance *"to give [them] the floor to ensure that people themselves are actors of change"*. It is about collecting the story from the person's perspective. The role of an interviewer is *"to ensure that the patient's words are heard by those who are at levels of responsibility"*.

While it can have a legal meaning or advocacy purpose toward decision makers, "*testimony does not necessarily aims at communicating a message, but it is a matter of dignity, of answering an essential need for recognition.*" mentioned another participant.

Anna, a nurse working with migrants in Spain said that *"Melilla is the perfect place to gather testimony"*. Listening to people's stories, collecting evidence is part of her work and she feels privileged to meet and get a sense of their dreams, life path and expectations in Europe. Migrants *"arrive here exhausted with an incredible travel history and Melilla is the first step in their dream. They stay here*

for a while, they don't leave immediately. Upon arrival, they enter an asylum procedure." Government are not always receptive to their stories and the members of the European network are proud to be on the ground to listen to them and to fight daily to improve access to healthcare. Exchange with patients also gives us an opportunity to question our own practices in the field

This workshop embodied a message of hope and solidarity towards those facing vulnerabilities in health. "Adversity is what this network have in common since we often work in a difficult social context". We are challenging established policies but also the perception of these populations by the society. We join forces to improve the situation of people facing multiple vulnerabilities in health.

Laura is a 24 years old Cameroonian woman. Firstly registered in Italy, she has been living in Belgium for two years to study nursing. When she became pregnant, she gave up her studies. She repeatedly requested the renewal of her European health insurance card in Italy, without success. Therefore she visited MdM in Brussels: "*there are always barriers in accessing healthcare when we are undocumented. I had a health insurance before but it has not been renewed. I have to advance money, but I am not refunded, even not half of the bill!*" Laura fears for the coming future, the cost of her delivery, she doesn't know how to get medical care for herself and her baby.

MdM Belgium – Brussels – December 2014

Link: https://mdmeuroblog.wordpress.com/tools/data-collection/