

## Gender-specific medicine watch

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### Gender-specific medicine comes to the European Parliament

On 27th June, the European Parliament in Brussels hosted an important round table promoted by MPs Elena Gentile (Europe) and Paola Boldrini (Italy) titled "Towards a gender-sensitive medicine: matters, tools and policies. Good practices from Italy and Germany". The meeting was attended by a great number of representatives from Italy and the other Member States that have been active in the gender-specific medicine field for years.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand which steps need to be taken to promote gender-specific medicine in the health policies of the EU's Member states and to summarise the Italian and German good practices for a medicine that is sensitive and receptive to sexual diversity and gender.

Those attending for Italy included Flavia Franconi (Department of Social Policy, Basilicata Regional Authority; Università di Sassari), Teresita Mazzei (Università degli Studi di Firenze), Erica Villa (Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia), Valeria Manicardi (Women's group of the Association of Diabetology Specialists), Alessandra Carè (Gender-Specific Medicine Centre, National Institute of Health), and a large delegation from Università di Ferrara: Roberto Manfredini, Michele Rubbini, Tiziana Bellini and Fulvia Signani, who presented their "good practices" for the dissemination of gender-specific medicine throughout Italy and abroad. Representatives of a number of academic and political institutions were also invited to take part. The only pharmaceutical company invited was Novartis, given its commitment to gender-specific medicine with regard to both research and its



A moment of the meeting in Brussels (27 June 2017), which was attended by the representatives of various academic and political institutions. The only pharmaceutical company invited was Novartis. *The Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine* was present on the table of each of the speakers.

promotion of initiatives such as the publication of the *IJGSM*, "the only Italian journal declared to be dedicated to gender-specific medicine".

Germany was represented by Vera Regitz-Zagrosek (Director of Berlin Institute of Gender in Medicine Center for Cardiovascular Research, Charité University, Berlin), who recently agreed to be part of the Editorial Board of the *Italian Journal of Gender-Specific Medicine*.

The initiative, which stemmed from the Bill (3603 of 12/02/2016) presented by Paola Boldrini to the Italian Parliament, to favour the diffusion and application of gender-specific medicine, met with the approval of European MP Gentile, who agreed to act as spokesperson and to extend the debate on the topic in order to evaluate the interest and point of view of the European Commission. The detailed analysis, by Hon. Boldrini, of the content of the Italian Bill constituted the focal point of the meeting, which was also attended with interest by Isabel De La Mata Barranco, Principal Advisor to the European Commission for Health. All those present launched an appeal to the institutions that they may work together to introduce this new vision of medicine into research, training and communication, including with practical proposals.

With the exposure in Brussels, Hon. Gentile aims to draw up a synthesis document to be put to the European parliament and Commission as a base for the drafting of European policy and projects in order to diffuse a gender-specific approach in the health policy of the Member States. "I hope," Hon. Gentile declared, "that

this initiative will help to highlight the importance of gender-specific medicine and will allow Europe to diffuse the best practices on the subject and undertake this mission. The European parliament," Gentile concluded, "will do its part to diffuse a gender-sensitive approach in community policy".

During the meeting, it was highlighted that gender-specific medicine is becoming increasingly important in the European Union's clinical practice. As is known, the gender-specific approach tends to make the appropriateness of healthcare principle concrete. Unfortunately, in Italy, the fact that there are more than twenty different health services, corresponding to the regional authorities and autonomous provincial authorities, means that organisational uniformity is impossible and may favour inequalities. A great deal needs to be done to make the different situations homogeneous. This makes the training of all the individuals involved in the health and social service the cornerstone of a gender-based method. Indeed, training is an important aspect of the Bill presented by Hon. Boldrini. Adopting a gender-specific approach means declaring war on inequality. Another important topic of discussion regarded research methods. In clinical studies, we need to adopt a different method that takes into consideration a number of factors such as social status and the level of education, parameters that are known to have an inversely proportionate impact on health. The application of a "transformational paradigm" that combines biomedical and psychosocial research.