European Society of Anaesthesiology calls for strengthened collaboration at EU level to manage the COVID-19 outbreak and its consequences across Europe

15 April 2020 – Although countries in the EU are facing a different number of patients and emergencies related to COVID-19, a common thread uniting EU countries has been their leadership in providing a rapid answer to ensure appropriate intensive care. However, due to the decrease of healthcare budget in some Member States over recent years, inevitable resource challenges have emerged - resulting in a lower number of intensive care unit (ICU) beds, risks of treatment shortages and material, including essential protective equipment and ventilators. The delays in coordination - both between and within Member States - have also shown the vulnerability and inefficiencies of the supply chain of critical equipment, as European countries depend on suppliers from outside of the European borders. In light of these major and quite unprecedented challenges, coordinated action at EU level is absolutely critical to tackle the crisis, ensuring the safety of patients and healthcare professionals and anticipating future outbreaks.

The European Society of Anaesthesiology (ESA) - the leading European organisation for anaesthesia, intensive care, pain and perioperative medicine - has been tirelessly supporting its member societies in providing guidance on how to ensure patient and care giver safety in this crisis.

Anaesthesiologists have always pioneered patient safety and they continue to do so during these extraordinary times. Across the EU and beyond, they are currently working to save lives in an increasingly difficult environment and are key to the safe and effective care of patients diagnosed with COVID-19. Having expertise in airway management and intubation, ventilator management and treating patients with multiple comorbidities, anaesthesiologists are one of the leading care givers for COVID-19 patients requiring intensive care services. Moreover, they are at a high risk of exposure and infection due to the procedures they undertake.

Being on the frontline of the pandemic, ESA has been following the response of the EU Institutions with close interest, and welcomes the funds allocated by the European Commission, as well as the commitment of the European Parliament to play an active role in mitigating the massive and highly disruptive socio-economic impact of the crisis by adopting a Motion for a Resolution on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, addressing some of the most critical issues of the current situation.

In this context, the society calls upon national governments and the European Commission to strengthen their resolve and collaboration at EU level to combat the COVID-19 outbreak, adequately plan the recovery phases and better anticipate and manage future health emergencies by:

- developing a coherent set of guidelines and evidence-based strategies on the clinical management of COVID-19 during the emergency and recovery phases;
- stressing the strategic importance of ensuring the sustainability of the COVID-19 Clinical Management Support System to support clinicians in hospitals;
ensuring a future European health response mechanism will encompass an EU coordinated intensive care strategy that will oversee the timely and consistent supply of treatments, diagnostic tests, medical and technological equipment; and
• involving anaesthesiologists and other frontline healthcare professionals organisations in advisory panels and coordination groups at European level.

Healthcare professionals, including anaesthesiologists, together with all frontline workers, are showing incredible leadership and commitment to fighting this outbreak and ensuring the highest level of patient safety. The European Society of Anaesthesiology is committed to partnering with public institutions at local, national and EU level to provide a coordinated answer across Europe. Therefore, we call upon Governments and the EU Institutions to join us in this effort and strengthen their collaboration to tackle the COVID-19 crisis.

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