Subject: Increase in the incidence of depression among the elderly

Studies carried out by the Institute of Psychiatry and Psychology at the Università Cattolica in Rome have shown that seven out of ten elderly people living in old-age homes suffer from depression.

Given that it has now been established that this is a genuine illness, while average life expectancy is increasing in Europe, can the Commission state whether:

1. it is aware of the findings of these studies;
2. it has had research carried out into this illness and, if so, can provide details of the findings;
3. it has established contacts with the relevant government departments in the Member States with a view to exploring possible synergies in action to deal with this new emergency;
4. the same methods are used for the treatment of this illness in old-age homes in the various EU Member States?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission

(3 September 2001)

1. The Commission is not aware of any specific study carried through by the Institute of Psychiatry and Psychology in Rome on this issue. However, it is very much concerned by the burden of mental ill-health and of depression in particular. Unfortunately, the available data and especially the comparable data are very limited in this area. This is why an European expert group is currently working under the health monitoring programme on establishing a set of mental health indicators in order to better assess mental health and its determinants in the future. Moreover, one of the next health status reports of the Community will specifically be looking at mental health, the preliminary work for it being in progress.

So far, the data indicates that between 15 and 20% of adults are suffering from some form of mental problem, depression being one of the most common. The elderly population is clearly a risk group and due to the ageing of the European population, its importance will increase in the coming years. More research is definitively needed on risk factors, prevention, recognition, treatment and care of mental ill-health.

2. The Fifth framework programme of the Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (1998 to 2002) has a specific Key Action on Ageing Population. This key action ‘aims to (...) extend the quality of life and independence of older people, and to reduce the need for long-term care …’

Priority areas in the call for proposals of the 2001 Work Programme include, among others, ‘nervous system: stroke, Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of cognitive impairment, depression, Parkinson’s disease and peripheral neuropathies’.

The Commission has until now funded many projects dealing directly or indirectly with depression in old age: detection, treatment and geographical variation; prevention in urban and rural settings; functional and molecular mechanisms; nutritional and lifestyle factors; novel methods of analysis; home environment as determinant of healthy ageing; integrated health and social care …

In concordance with its interest for research on depression, the Commission is also planning to include research on depression in ageing population as a priority in the 2002 Work Programme, to be published later this year.
3. Under the health promotion programme the Commission has initiated the establishment of different European networks which involve the key players in the field. Following the last call for proposals a project of a consortium of 4 different networks had received a positive evaluation for funding, to carry out a pan European project on the development of coping and prevention strategies in relation to depression. One major target group will be elderly people. Although this project has not yet started the Commission can already confirm that there is an infrastructure in place that comprises all Member States and World health organisation (WHO) to tackle this issue.

4. The EC Treaty underlines that the organisation and delivery of health services and of medical care are the sole responsibility of the Member States. In practice, this means that it is up to the individual Member States to take the appropriate measures in order to assure that a range of suitable diagnostic procedures and types of therapy are available for patients, and to decide on the conditions under which these services are accessible. For this reason, the Community is not in a position to comment on the treatment of depression of elderly in old-ages homes in the Member States.

---

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-1809/01**
by Mihail Papayannakis (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(19 June 2001)

Subject: Olympic boxing arena

The plan to site the Olympic boxing arena on public sports facilities in Palaio Faliro has provoked a storm of protest in Greece. The Coordinating Committee of the campaign to save the coastline of the Saronic Gulf claims that the new arena will cover an area of 1.5-2 hectares. Locating the boxing arena on the site of the existing sports facilities will also deprive 3 000 children of the chance to pursue sporting activities, while all the indications are that the arena, which was originally presented as being temporary, will be permanent.

In the light of the above complaints, will the Commission say to what extent environmental feasibility studies have been drawn up for this project?

**Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission**
(24 July 2001)

The Commission has no information regarding the project to build the Olympic boxing arena in Palaio Faliro, as reported by the Honourable Member. However, in order that it might examine the dossier, the Commission would ask the Honourable Member to provide it with more specific information on the project in question, including a description of the project as approved, or in the course of being approved, and of any adverse effect it might have on the environment.

---

**WRITTEN QUESTION P-1814/01**
by Alexandros Alavanos (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(13 June 2001)

Subject: Water shortage on the Aegean islands

The Aegean islands, particularly the Cyclades, are suffering from a severe shortage of water. According to scientific studies, the Cyclades require 12 million cubic metres of drinking water a year, only 60-65 % of which is supplied, while demand is expected to double by 2030. The problem is particularly acute during the summer owing to the complete lack of rainfall and the several-fold increase in the population through tourism. At the same time, the proliferation of deep boreholes for drawing water has resulted in dangerous salinization of the groundwater.