

**Opening Speech for ESNO Session  
14- January 2025**

**David ODonnel**

Good morning, everyone,

It is a privilege to welcome you all to this critical discussion on the intersection of policy, politics, and economics in shaping the future of our healthcare systems. Today, we gather to address one of the most pressing challenges: ensuring the resilience and sustainability of our health systems, with a focus on the cornerstone of patient care—our nursing professionals.

Nurses are not only the backbone but the very heart of healthcare. They are the first line of care and often the final support system for patients. Yet, as we meet today, the stark realities of their profession cannot be ignored. Across Europe, nurses face immense pressure due to workforce shortages, insufficient recognition, and outdated policy frameworks. These challenges, combined with the demands of an aging population, the looming impacts of climate change on public health, and the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore an urgent need for systemic change.

The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) has been a tireless advocate in this space, working to elevate the voice of nurses to the EU level. Whether addressing workforce certification, recognition of qualifications, lifelong learning, or career advancement, ESNO has laid the groundwork for meaningful dialogue. But despite these efforts, a comprehensive platform to tackle these interconnected issues remains absent.

Healthcare is not siloed; it intersects with employment, education, social policy, and finance. Nurses sit at the crossroads of these sectors. If we fail to provide them with the necessary tools, support, and recognition, we risk undermining the very systems designed to safeguard public health.

This is why we need your help. To the policymakers, MEPs, and Commission representatives here today: we must create a structured, unified platform to discuss and act on these challenges.

Nurses are the pillars of our healthcare systems, and without them, those systems are crumbling. Investing in their future is not just an investment in healthcare; it is an investment in better patient outcomes, societal resilience, and our collective ability to face future crises—whether pandemics, climate-related health issues, or the demands of an aging population.

We are here to explore solutions, and we have a distinguished panel to guide this conversation. As we delve into these topics, I encourage you all to think boldly about what needs to change and how we can work together to reshape the narrative around healthcare professionals in Europe.

**Questions to Open the Panel Discussion:**

**1. To the Nurses (ESNO Representatives):**

- Can you share your experiences on how current policies impact your ability to provide care? What changes do you believe are most urgent to improve your working conditions and professional recognition?

**2. To the MEPs:**

- What role do you see for the European Parliament in advancing policy changes that address nurses' needs, from certification to cross-border recognition? How can we ensure sustainable investment in the healthcare workforce?
- Would you be open to work with ESNO and other association within a dedicated interest group on Healthcare Professionals and if yes, what according to you should be the biggest focus of such group?

**3. To the Commission Representative (DG GROW):**

- With nurses being central to healthcare delivery, how does DG GROW envision supporting a unified platform for addressing cross-sectoral issues, including workforce mobility, education, and financial sustainability?
- The recognition of qualifications under Annex V of the Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications is crucial for ensuring the mobility and career progression of nurses across Europe. However, challenges persist, such as discrepancies in training standards and delays in updates to the Annex that reflect evolving healthcare needs. How does the Commission plan to address these issues to ensure a more seamless and adaptive recognition framework that supports the mobility and skills development of nurses while meeting the growing demands of the healthcare sector?

**4. To All Speakers:**

- Given the complex challenges of economic constraints and workforce shortages, what concrete steps should we prioritize at the European level to safeguard the future of nursing and healthcare resilience?