Health protection: breast implants, Community and national measures

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The committee unanimously adopted the report by Catherine STIHLER (PES, UK) welcoming the Commission communication. Among its recommendations, the committee wanted the Member States to ban direct advertising to the public for breast implants or breast implant operations, as France had done. Since breast implants always entailed risks, MEPs demanded that objective, non-commercial information be provided through national public health services instead. The committee said there was a need to regulate advertising in some Member States, which was fuelling the demand for implants without providing balanced information. Advertising for "cosmetic surgery" should carry clear bold health warnings, and 'Before and after' pictures should not be used in such advertisements. Moreover, the focus should be on promoting and securing acceptance of women as they actually are "rather than allowing unregulated advertising practices to impose an ideal conception of beauty as the norm". MEPs also called for better information for patients, tracking and surveillance, quality control and research. It was necessary to raise general public awareness of the potential risk of breast implants, including adverse effects in the event of pregnancy or for nursing mothers. Implants in women under 18 should be authorised only on medical grounds. The committee called for a compulsory annual follow-up examination and also urged that details of breast implant operations be recorded by a compulsory National Breast Implant Registration system in each Member State, to enable both producers and patients to be traced. Finally, it said that the cost of implants should include a pre-meeting with the surgeon, clear informed discussion of the implications of having implants as well as the alternatives, with a properly trained and accredited independent counsellor, a cooling-off period of no less than four to six weeks, a detailed pre-implant case history, post-implant counselling and periodic review.