

Healthcare. Father Bebber (ARIS): "We must ensure that everyone can access treatment, without exceptions and in the best possible way"

The throwaway culture must be rejected by caring for the most fragile among us; treatment must always be guaranteed, even when there is no hope of recovery; the role of private accredited healthcare must be recognised and enhanced. These are among the priorities identified by Father **Virginio Bebber**, chairman of the Religious Association of Healthcare and Socio-Sanitary Institutions ([ARIS](#)) and managing director of the [Opera San Camillo](#) Foundation. We asked him to elaborate on the suggestions contained in **Pope Francis' Message for the XXIX World Day of the Sick**, traditionally held on 11 February, marking the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, on the theme "You have but one teacher and you are all brothers. A trust-based relationship to guide care for the sick." A total of 259 healthcare facilities and socio-sanitary structures are members of ARIS, including 26 Scientific Institutes for Research, Hospitalisation and Healthcare (IRCCS) and 17 classified hospitals. Opera San Camillo includes 15 facilities in Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria. 

It means looking the person in front of me in the eye and saying 'you're not alone, I will hold your hand'."

The Pope notes the extent to which the pandemic revealed inefficient health systems and failings in the care of the sick; that the elderly and the most vulnerable are not always guaranteed access to treatment... This was especially evident last spring, when the healthcare system was overwhelmed and focused almost entirely on COVID-19, neglecting other patients. Health facilities were so congested that it became impossible to devote appropriate time and effort to other diseases. The improved organisation in the second phase, on the other hand, allowed for a more targeted response to people's health needs. The Pope further highlights the importance of investing resources in treatment and care. Could the funds earmarked in the Recovery Plan for health services - almost €20 billion - offer a new window of opportunity?

"Not only is it important to invest in health care, it is absolutely necessary.

This is especially true in the light of the reckless spending cuts made in the recent past, a major factor behind the difficulties experienced at this tragic time. *However, it would be a mistake if the allocation of resources left out private accredited healthcare, as too often happens, prioritizing public health alone.* I am thinking specifically of our member institutions, facilities run by 'non-profit' religious bodies and congregations, which far from yielding profit, are expressions of the Church in healthcare. Over the last few months we have borne witness to our charisms by offering humble support. No one has thanked us; on the contrary

In fact, we were virtually forgotten even in the 'Ristori' decrees providing for non-refundable grants.

Nevertheless, we are extremely proud of the courage and humanity shown by our medical and paramedical staff. **Besides the economic aspects, is it only a question of technical, operational and organizational management, or is the challenge facing our health system also of an ethical and anthropological nature?** We should ask ourselves if there is still someone who is placing the human person at the centre of whichever socio-political project. I cannot describe the joy with which I received the Pope's cry of alarm against hypocrisy, the hypocrisy of those who talk but do nothing. We have had enough of those who continue talking but then fail to act. Francis says in

clear terms that no one is immune from hypocrisy, and that hypocrisy is a grave evil which often makes us forget that "we are creatures", and thus children of the one Father, called to live universal fraternity. Brothers and sisters who need one another and who all need the Father. The pandemic has laid bare our human frailty. After the pandemic, the Pope remarks, we will certainly be different because we have all experienced moments of insecurity and uncertainty. *We must rediscover ourselves as men and women, as Christians and children of God. Once again the Holy Father highlights the centrality of mutual trust as the foundation of basis of care, calling for a "covenant" between patients and healthcare workers.* Trust is a precious balm, as the Pope says: it means looking into each other's eyes and discovering mutually binding love. But now there is no time. Stopping is not an option: efficiency and staff shortage compel us to accelerate our pace. Little room is left for feelings. In these tragic days, we have been advising our carers attending to the sick to reassure them of our love. The last caress of so many brothers and sisters who have died in solitude was received by their own hands. Trust, indeed, but love must be present at all times. **Yet a society is all the more humane insofar as it knows how to care for its most frail members... No one must feel alone and abandoned, Francis reminded us. This is where the extremely delicate and crucial issue of the continuity of treatment takes precedence, even when recovery is impossible, even if some claim that it is only worthwhile treating those who 'can make it'...** The life of an elderly or seriously ill person is not less precious than that of a young or healthy person. This is always true and not only in times of pandemic. Unfortunately, what Pope Francis calls the "culture of death" is increasingly gaining ground in the world and in our country. Many countries have cleared the way for euthanasia, while others are preparing to do so. In our country they are trying to disguise it as the legalisation of assisted suicide. The discussions we have been listening to in these tragic days are the product of the culture of death, by virtue of which human life now has a specific price, depending on its productive capacity. Therefore, we should not be surprised if certain statements are made: we fight this culture of death by proclaiming our faith and bearing concrete witness to it. As for the substance of your question, my question is

who can claim the right to decide who is worthy of treatment and who is not?

We must make sure these kind of questions will never be raised again, and that everyone receives the best possible treatment without exception. **Nevertheless, the news that two people aged 102 and 103 received the vaccine against COVID-19 sparked a controversy on social media. "Wasted doses. Just to let them live a few more days," one person wrote...** The Pope's strong and unequivocal exhortation against the throwaway culture is applicable in the face of this "economy-driven" rationale. A society can only be called civil if it leaves no-one behind. *We want to restore dignity to every person and continue caring for and accompanying them until their last breath.*

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