



The English children's story of 'Dr Doolittle', who possessed the skill of talking to and with the animals, introduced one such creature not found in the average farmyard. This was the push-me-pull-you, an unusual animal with heads at both ends and therefore never quite sure which way it was looking or going. I sometimes think the European Commission must have a little push-me-pull-you in its blood. Its attitude to diabetes is occasionally like this.

Don't get me wrong and don't let me discourage or offend the inestimable officials in Directorate-General (DG) Health and other directorates, who are on our side really but just don't have enough money or staff or time or encouragement to make the progress we should like; but just occasionally my cup of frustration runneth over.

We have a momentum going behind our drive to put diabetes high up the health agenda for action. We have the rare event of the European Parliament turning a Written Declaration into a Parliament policy by persuading well over half the Members to support it. That does not mean the easy way of pushing a voting button; it means taking the trouble individually to go and sign the Declaration in person. We have the revitalised diabetes interest and support group of Members, with my colleagues the Dutch Socialist Dorette Corbey and the Latvian Liberal Georgs Andrejevs joining me

## An over-cautionary tale

*John Bowis, MEP*

as co-chairmen. We have the equally encouraging decision by the Austrian Presidency to make diabetes one of its key health priorities and persuading the Council of Ministers to vote for a Council Policy on this. We have the unique event of the United Nations adopting a resolution on diabetes and thus making it a global priority for every UN Member State. But what do we have from the Commission? Words – encouraging, polite, but, in a word, procrastination.

There is no doubt that the Commissioner, Markos Kyprianou, shares our concern about the increase in the prevalence of diabetes in the European Union and in particular of type 2 diabetes, which accounts for some 90% of all our cases. He said as much in a letter to me. He also pointed out that obesity and physical inactivity contribute at least two-thirds of the burden of type 2 diabetes and the Commission acknowledges the Austrian Presidency emphasis on the promotion of healthy lifestyles. A White Paper on Nutrition and Physical Activity is on the 2007 agenda for DG Health.

But the announcement by an official of DG Health, heard and warmly welcomed by many of the key players in European diabetes, that the Commission would shortly bring forward a Recommendation or Framework Directive for Diabetes has since been played down, if not denied and we are now told that 'over time' the experience of current strategies and platforms 'could provide a basis' for developing a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the prevention of diabetes, possibly in conjunction with a recommendation on the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

I have no problem with the idea of bringing together the common messages for diabetes and cardiovascular disease – and, indeed, stroke. I do not, however, like or accept the phrase 'over time', which could mean next year, or next decade, but certainly does not mean this year. It is clear we have considerable political work to do.

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### Author's details

John Bowis was elected in 1999 to represent London in the European Parliament for the British Conservative Party (EPP/ED Group). He was re-elected in June 2004. From 1997–99 he worked in support of the World Health Organization's Global Campaigns on Mental Health and Epilepsy.

From 1987–97 he was a Member of the UK Parliament, where from 1993–96 he was a Health Minister and from 1996–97 a Transport Minister. While at Health he represented the UK on the EU Health Council.

In the European Parliament he is EPP/ED Co-ordinator and Spokesman on the Environment, Health & Food Safety Committee. He was Rapporteur on Food Safety, on Health & EU Enlargement, on Professional Qualifications and on the European Centre for Disease Prevention & Control. He lives with type 2 diabetes.

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