



Greek Elimination Day 22 November 2017

The Elimination of Hepatitis C in Greece and Europe is possible by 2030

BRUSSELS, 22 November 2017 – Leading Greek government representatives, politicians, experts, medical specialists and hepatitis patients' advocacy groups gathered in Brussels today to announce their intention to work jointly towards the elimination of the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) in Greece by 2030 by signing the 'Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto'.

The event follows the first European Policy Summit dedicated to the Elimination of the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) in Europe that took place in February 2016 in Brussels and during which the '**Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto**' was presented outlining policy asks for the elimination of hepatitis C in Europe by 2030.

Georgios Kyrtos, Member of the European Parliament who hosted the event, stated, "The elimination of Hepatitis C in Greece and Europe by 2030 is achievable, as long as we are united, creative and seize all the opportunities given to us at national level and European level. If we follow the appropriate policy on the issue, we will send the message that, with a step by step approach, we can exit the crisis in the Health sector in Greece".

Panos Papadopoulos, Chief of the Health Minister's Cabinet., said, "Successful negotiation with pharmaceutical companies has given the opportunity to 5.500 HCV patients to access innovative treatments. The Ministry of Health proceeded to implement the National Action Plan, on 28th of July this year. Consistent with our commitments to eradicate hepatitis C by 2030, we are also establishing a Monitoring Committee for the National Action Plan, which will be announced in the next few days."

Nikos Manios, Chair of Standing Committee on Social Affairs - Hellenic Parliament, mentioned "The Hellenic Parliament continues to support efforts to tackle communicable diseases and is committed to resuming the meeting held on 20/12/2016 entitled "HIV and other communicable diseases (hepatitis C, drug additions)".

George Papatheodoridis, Professor in Medicine and Gastroenterology at the Medical School of the University of Athens and Chair of Hellenic Association for the Study of the Liver, stated, "The elimination of hepatitis C in Greece is feasible, but it requires the immediate implementation of our National Plan and mainly the promotion of screening, a planned reach of high-risk population groups and enhancement of hepatology clinics in order to implement the necessary additional actions".

George Kalamitsis, Chair of the Hellenic Liver Patients Association "Prometheus" noted "Hepatitis C is a serious public health problem. In order to be consistent with our commitment to the World Health Organization regarding the eradication of the disease by 2030, we must implement appropriate and targeted interventions, with priority in addressing the needs of vulnerable population groups. We must be mindful of health inequalities that People Who Inject Drugs and prisoners encounter. Broadening of treatment access criteria, reimbursement for diagnostic assays as well as detecting patients who remain undiagnosed should be a priority. "

Angelos Hatzakis, Co-Chair of the Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association and Professor at the Dept. of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, University of Athens School of Medicine said "Recent data on

Greece have shown that a hepatitis C eradication policy will lead to enormous savings of funds that would have been spent in the future for treating liver cirrhosis, hepatocellular cancer and liver transplantations."

About Hepatitis C in Europe & Greece

- HCV is a major global public health issue with significant morbidity and mortality rates. Up to 180 million individuals are infected worldwide. Between 350,000-500,000 people die annually of HCV-related causes.
- In Europe, more people die each year from HCV than from HIV.
- Despite Europe's effective epidemic tracking, HCV continues to spread undetected as a "silent pandemic" in Europe, as patients often have no symptoms during the first 20-30 years. In addition to the progression of the disease in advanced stages such as cirrhosis and cancer, there is also the significant economic burden of the disease due to healthcare costs and indirect loss of productivity.
- In Greece, approximately 90,000-160,000 people have contacted HCV virus and 75,000-130,000 have chronic hepatitis C. Recent research shows that about 80% of patients with hepatitis C do not know their HCV status and only 58% of diagnosed patients have received treatment. (Papatheodoridis, 2015).
- In accordance with estimations of predictive models, the number of cirrhosis and HCV related deaths, would increase by 25% and 23%, respectively, in comparison with 2015, if we continued to use the previous interferon-based regimens. On the contrary, the widespread use of Direct Acting Antivirals (DAAs) is expected to significantly reduce the number of cirrhosis and HCV related deaths in Greece in the future. (Gountas, 2017)

About Elimination

- According to World Health Organization, the goal of elimination of hepatitis C will be accomplished if deliberate efforts achieve a 90% reduction of incidence and a 65% reduction of mortality rates in a defined geographical area.
- HCV elimination was made possible by recent therapeutic advances, which have made HCV curable in the majority of instances - cure rates have progressed from 10% in 1991 (first interferon approved treatment for HCV) to over 95% in 2017 (approval of more DAAs) and at the same time the percentage of diagnosed patients who may or wish to receive treatment increased from about 50% to almost 100%.
- Achieving the elimination of hepatitis C, however, requires the development of holistic approaches and strategies to improve overall awareness of the disease, increase screening and linkage to care of HCV diagnosed patients with the Health System.

About the "Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto"

Signatories

Signatories of the 'Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto' pledge to:

- Make hepatitis C and its elimination in Europe an explicit public health priority to be pursued at all levels
- Ensure that patients, civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders are directly involved in developing and implementing hepatitis C elimination strategies
- Pay particular attention to the links between hepatitis C and social marginalisation
- Introduce a European Hepatitis Awareness Week

The Elimination Manifesto is supported by the following organisations:

- European Liver Patients Association (ELPA)
- European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)
- Viral Hepatitis Prevention Board (VHPB)
- The Correlation Network
- The International Center for Migration Health and Development (ICMHD)
- The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA)
- Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association

The main authors of the "Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto" are:

- Prof Jeffrey V. Lazarus, University of Copenhagen (Denmark)
- Prof Mark Thursz, Imperial College, London (UK)
- Prof Pierre Van Damme, Viral Hepatitis Prevention Board, Vaccine and Infectious Disease Institute, Antwerp (Belgium)
- Prof Angelos Hatzakis, Athens University Medical School (Greece)

-ENDS-

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About Hepatitis B & C Public Policy Association

The Hepatitis B & C Public Policy Association was founded in 2009 by a group of leading European scientists, public health experts and patient advocates. We aim to urge and facilitate the formulation of public policies at national and international level for the communication, prevention and management of viral Hepatitis B and C. The Association's unique approach in furtherance of this aim is to gather together, and work in partnership with, the major stakeholders in the field of these diseases including regulators, patients, clinicians, public health and civil society communities and the private sector. The first ever HCV Policy Summit dedicated to the elimination of hepatitis C in Europe was organized by this association and its partners. in February 2016 in Brussels. The Summit was addressed by EU Health Commissioner Andriukaitis, MEPs and national policy-makers.

For more information about the Association's activities please visit: www.hepbcppa.org or www.hcvbrusselssummit.eu