PRESS RELEASE

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A major step forward for pain patients! Health ministers call for action on access to treatment for patients suffering from chronic pain

Friday June 16th, at a high level EU meeting, Health Ministers included chronic pain in the conclusions inviting Member States to evaluate access to treatment.

Brussels, Belgium – Friday June 16th, the Council of the European Union on Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs adopted its conclusions on "Encouraging Member States-driven Voluntary Cooperation of Health Systems" (1).

Under the leadership of the Maltese Presidency, the Health Ministers have agreed that it is time to evaluate access to treatment for patients with chronic pain, while recognising the need to maintain the balance between innovation, availability, accessibility and affordability. The aim is to increase the effectiveness, accessibility and resilience of health systems across the European Union, and to identify priority areas where cooperation between health systems may add value.

This is a substantial step for pain patients throughout the EU towards getting pain recognised as a disease in its own right. The Societal Impact of Pain (SIP) platform is committed to ensure that these words are transformed into actions.

This comes only one week after Martin Seychell, Deputy Director General DG SANTE, formally announced the launch of the Expert Group on the Social Impact of Pain within the EU Health Policy Platform during the Societal Impact of Pain symposium (SIP 2017) held in Malta. While the Expert Group, aims at building a bridge between health systems, pain stakeholders and policy makers, the inclusion of pain in the council conclusions highlights an increasing understanding by European institutions and Member States of the need to act now to help the one in five EU citizens suffering from chronic pain.

Since 2010, the SIP-Platform has been calling for policies addressing the societal impact of pain around the EU. The SIP platform aims to create structured EU-wide cooperation with lasting political impact, to find solutions that improve the lives of those with chronic pain, but also minimize the impact of pain on society. The SIP platform does so by raising awareness of the impact pain has on our societies, by facilitating the exchange of information and best-practices and supporting European wide policy strategies and activities for improved pain policies in Europe. As an international initiative the SIP platform provides opportunities for discussion amongst all stakeholders involved (health care professionals, pain patients, pain advocacy groups, politicians, health insurances, representatives of health authorities, regulators and budget holders).

Pain causes a problem for individuals as well as a challenge for healthcare systems, economies and society: each year, approximately one in five Europeans or 20 percent of the adult population in Europe are affected by chronic pain (2). This includes 153 million people suffering migraine or other disabling headaches, 200 million musculoskeletal disorders and 100 million people experiencing other forms of chronic pain (3). The estimated direct and indirect healthcare costs for chronic pain disorders in European Member States vary between two and three percent of GDP across the EU (4) (5). For 2016, this would result in up to 441 billion Euros annually (6). Experts estimate that half of all citizens living in the EU at some point in their lives suffer from back pain. Approximately 15 percent of these citizens with back pain are on sick leave for over one month (7). With more than 500 million sick days per year in Europe, musculoskeletal pain alone causes almost 50 percent of all absences from work lasting at least three days in the EU and 60 percent of permanent work incapacity (4). Worldwide chronic pain conditions (in particular back pain) are by far the greatest cause of disability (8) (9). Unsurprisingly chronic pain is one of the major reasons why people exit the labour market prematurely and it contributes significantly to disability retirement (10).

Yet pain remains poorly managed and under-treated, affecting not only patients, but society at large as it increases the risks of other health problems, social exclusion and poverty (11). In order to tackle the societal impact of pain it needs to be prioritized in policy making while adressing a whole systems perspective (12).

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A major step forward for pain patients and addressing the societal impact of pain!

You find more information at www.SIP-Platform.eu or contact:

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About the SIP-Platform
The Societal Impact of Pain (SIP) is an international, multi-stakeholder platform created as a joint initiative of the European Pain Federation EFIC® and Grünenthal with the aim to:

- raise awareness of the relevance of the impact that pain has on our societies, health and economic systems
- exchange information and sharing best-practices across all Member States of the European Union
- develop and foster European-wide policy strategies for an improved pain management in Europe (Pain Policy).

The scientific framework of the "Societal Impact of Pain" (SIP) platform is under the responsibility of the European Pain Federation EFIC®. Cooperation partners for SIP 2017 are Pain Alliance Europe (PAE) and Active Citizenship Network (ACN). The pharmaceutical company Grünenthal GmbH is responsible for funding and non-financial support (e.g. logistical support). The scientific aims of the SIP symposia have been endorsed by over 300 international and national pain advocacy groups, scientific organisations and authorities.

Literature

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