

Patients' right to avoid pain: reducing the burden of COVID-19, promoting best practices across EU

EU Civic Prize on Chronic Pain - III Edition- Award Ceremony

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FINAL REMARKS

By Mariano Votta

Responsible EU Affairs at Cittadinanzattiva, Director Active Citizenship Network

Key messages and recommendations:

- 1) In my opinion, one of the main messages that clearly emerges from the good practices collected is that, as it often occurs, it is the team and not the individual that wins: multidisciplinary medical teams, collaboration between the public and private sectors, dialogue between the world of research and patient associations, involvement of civil society, among others, are present in most of these experiences.
- 2) Focusing on the people involved and multi-stakeholder collaboration, we try to facilitate partnerships, reducing the distance between the local and the European dimensions for a more effective coordination in the field of chronic pain. We aim to increase the awareness of the institutional interlocutors also considering the impact that this phenomenon has on the daily life of so many European citizens, telling stories, giving voice, and protecting the weakest.
- 3) All of today's winners have been invited to support a joint initiative called "Pain Euro-Mediterranean Coalition", promoted by my organization and the Sine Dolore European Pain Foundation. It is not a new association nor an EU umbrella organization, but the first civic ~~hub,~~ ~~an~~ incubator of best practices against pain in Europe, an informal network composed by manager concretely engaged to carry out good practices across Europe. And the *Sine Dolore World Park* in Menorca, Spain, is the context where - hopefully soon – we will meet each other, share experiences, and promote initiatives in a different context. We strongly believe that the EU network of managers of good practices on chronic pain could represent a way to reduce the impact of chronic pain in Europe by ensuring that the right to avoid unnecessary suffering and pain (11th Right in the EU Charter of Patient Rights) could be recognized, guaranteed and respected everywhere and to everyone. In the context of the "Pain Euro-Mediterranean Coalition", for instance, some weeks ago we have launched -with the scientific support of the Research Center in Social Sciences at Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal - a survey in several languages on "chronic pain condition across Europe in the age of Covid-19", another example to cooperation among experts, researchers, PAGs and civic society.
- 4) Our hope is that, starting from today's winners, we can all continue with renewed enthusiasm in our commitment that I am sure it can be translated as working towards the respect of the patients' right to avoid unnecessary suffering and pain. A commitment that recognizes the key role of the civic society as a whole, totally in line with the message widespread in occasion of the Informal Council of EU Health Ministers in 2014: "It is important to remember the

contribution of non-profit associations toward the development and growth of the palliative culture; and the promotion of initiatives to strengthen and support civic organizations in their work to help patients suffering from pain and patients requiring palliative care. It is vital that patients are of their rights and able to make informed choices”¹.

Follow up and possible next step:

In line with our long-term commitment on the topic, we will try to do our part also in the future. Indeed, we have set some premises to broaden our activities concerning the fight against chronic pain in the following directions:

- 1) As Ambassador of the “European Pillar of Social Rights”, we will cooperate with Institutions and relevant stakeholders, as those awarded today, to contribute to further develop the topic of chronic pain in the European Pillar of Social Rights, a vital instrument to achieve social justice and equality in the EU. As you know, at European level, chronic pain has a major impact on workforce participants and productivity and is not adequately acknowledged nor addressed. In this context, one of our main interest is to develop the topic of chronic pain in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights, with particular attention to the need of citizens suffering of (low) back pain.
- 2) Through to an official agreement with Excellence in Pediatrics Institute (EIPi), an association that provides continuing medical education to a global network of over 45,000 child health care professionals, we’ll try to develop a common initiative on pain in pediatric age.
- 3) Through to an official agreement with the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO), we’ll try to identify how to better address the connection between obesity & pain.
- 4) Through our official involvement in the “All.Can International”, an organization with members representing all stakeholders across the entire cancer pathway, we hope to contribute to address the topic of pain in the framework of the “European Beating Cancer Plan”.
- 5) With regard to our activity to collect good practices across Europe, we are proud to have contributed to increasing European awareness of the humanitarian, clinical, socio-economic and educational problems associated with persistent pain and the need for high level attention for clinical solutions, patients’ needs, and research funds. For instance, chronic pain was mentioned in the 2017 Conclusions of the Council of the European Union; the EU has just allocated more funds for research dedicated to this topic; the European Commission-DG-Sante has opened its EU Health Policy Platform to a group of experts on this subject.

In line with our aims of reinforcing our policy on the fight against pain at different levels, expanding the “agora” of operators of good practices on pain, and encouraging the exchange of experiences among health professionals, healthcare providers, institutions, civic associations, and patient advocacy groups, also collecting relevant experiences within and outside Europe, in the past months we have signed official agreements with the following organizations that I want to thank:

- From Italy, the patients’ association “NO PAIN Onlus”;
- From Portugal, the patients’ association ADDCA, “Associação de Doentes de Dor Crónica dos Açores;
- From Spain, the patients’ association APDOL, “Asociación Española de Pacientes Contra el Dolor”; and Sine Dolore European Pain Foundation, the entity that promotes since many

¹ Ibidem.

years the “SINE DOLORE WORLD PARK”, the only theme park in the world against pain and quality of life.

- From Spain, the scientific society on pain with a multidisciplinary approach called SEMDOR “Sociedad Española Multidisciplinar del Dolor” and the network of doctors specializing in pain treatment EMNIPRE “European Multidisciplinary Network in Pain Research and Education”.
- Outside Europe, we have also strengthened alliance with “LisKen Caribbean Against Pain Organization”, a Dominican Republic association already in contact with EU entities devoted to the topic of chronic pain.

6) What is still lacking today is a constructive media attention. The collection of good practices provides a valuable asset, as it gives emphasis and visibility to what is not visible. In this regard, please let me thank our media partners: the valuable platform to the health sector Health Europa, the international peer reviewed journal “Advance in Health and Behaviour”, and “Multidisciplinary Pain Journal”, the scientific journal of the Multidisciplinary Pain Society.

- Finally, please let me remind you that this conference was kindly supported by the MEPs Interest Group “European Patients' Rights & Cross-Border Healthcare”, which today is represented by MEP Kateřina Konečná (Czechia) from The Left Group, that I want to thank.
- Let me also thank Pfizer for having supported the III edition of the “European Civic Prize on Chronic Pain Collecting Good Practices”.
- At the same time, please let me thank all the panelists and once again our moderator Neda Milevska-Kostova.
- As always, thank you to the staff of Active Citizenship Network (Daniela, Giulia, Gianluca, Bianca, Manuela, Elisa) and to our communication office.
- We will soon send out our newsletter with the link to download our Annual Report with all the good practices collected.
- Thank you all again and stay safe. Goodbye from Rome.