



PRESS RELEASE

World Alzheimer's Day: The 21st-century epidemic

There are currently 200.000 people suffering from dementia in Greece; this number is expected to rise up to 365.000 by 2050

Worldwide, a new case of dementia is diagnosed every 3 seconds, thereby making this disease one of the most important social, economical and health crises of the 21st century

The annual cost of dementia in Greece is between 3 and 6 billion euros

Wednesday September 21st, 2016. **Alzheimer's disease** is an **epidemic of the 21st century**. In all countries of the world, the increase of life expectancy has brought dementia, and its more common form of Alzheimer's disease, into the limelight, as a **major medical, social and economical problem**.

There are 200.000 people currently living in Greece with dementia, and 47 million worldwide. The number is expected to dramatically augment in the future, due to the increase of life expectancy, in both developed and developing countries.

In the context of the **World Alzheimer's Day** (September 21st), a Press Conference was held by the **Athens Association of Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders**, and the **Panhellenic Federation of Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders**, with the **generous support** of the pioneer Greek pharmaceutical industry **ELPEN**. Speakers included: **Mrs. Paraskevi Sakka**, *Neurologist-Psychiatrist, President of the Athens Association of Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders, and President of the National Observatory for Dementia*, **Mrs. Magda Tsolaki**, *Neurologist-Psychiatrist, Professor at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and President of the Panhellenic Federation of Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders*, and **Mr. Dimitris Takis**, *Journalist, and caregiver of an individual suffering from Alzheimer's disease*.

Mrs. **Sakka** referred to the social, financial and health dimension of Alzheimer's disease, emphasizing that: «*This is one of the **biggest crises of the 21st century**. It is **an overwhelming health problem**, with the number of patients expected to **reach 365.000 by 2050!** In addition, dementia has a serious impact on the family environment, as there are currently **400.000***

caregivers in Greece, who provide daily care to individuals with dementia, thus taking on a huge practical, financial and mental burden.»

Mrs. Sakka also mentioned that the **burden for insurance funds** and the **state budget** is also **dramatic**, pointing out that: *«In the **European Union**, Alzheimer’s disease presently absorbs **25% of the overall Health expenditure**. In **Greece**, the **annual cost for dementia is between 3 and 6 billion euros**. These terrifying numbers underline the great need for dementia to become a **priority for the Health & Social Care planning**. In fact, this is the aim of both the Panhellenic Federation of Alzheimer’s Disease & Related Disorders, which was established in 2007, and the **35 Alzheimer’s associations**, which are active in informing and sensitizing the public, as well as supporting individuals with dementia and their families.»*

Within this context, Mrs. Sakka noted that: *«Since **December 2014**, we have a **National Plan of Action for dementia and Alzheimer’s disease** in our country. This Plan includes **comprehensive proposals for Actions**, and pertains to all domains of this major issue. The **National Observatory for Dementia** works towards the materialization of this Plan, yet everyone’s mobilization – that is, patients, families, associations– is essential for its immediate realization.»*

Mrs. Tsolaki mentioned that the **international research community** is giving an extremely harsh fight, in order to **create, quite soon, a drug** that will modify the disease’s evolution at every stage, in a satisfactory manner. Mrs. Tsolaki noted: *«In **therapeutic Genetics**, scientists are **thinking about modifying the expression of predisposition genes**, so that normal elderly individuals can remain normal. They are trying to alter the expression of genes, which determine the switch from Mild Dementia to Alzheimer’s disease, and to inhibit the activity of genes, which determine the rapid evolution from the onset of the disease.»*

Mrs. Tsolaki stressed that: *«The disease **must be dealt with as early as possible**, that is, during its preclinical stages. Brain damages must be treated before clinical symptoms appear.»* She added: *«Many studies (390 Phase II studies, 1996-2015) using monoclonal antibodies have not succeeded in their goal, yet **the efforts are still ongoing**, with other drugs, such as solanezumab, aducanumab, crenezumab and ganterumab.»* Mrs. Tsolaki concluded by emphasizing that, in the future, new treatments are expected to be administered as complementary to the symptomatic treatments that are currently used. She added that the researcher’s moto in curing dementia is: **«Patients should participate during the correct stage, for the right duration, and with the appropriate measures!»**

Recognizing and relieving the caregiver’s burden is an integral part of the disease’s effective handling. In Greece, the lack of services and structures for people with dementia, as well as their families, is extremely important. Having experienced the problem, **Mr. Dimitris Takis**, journalist and *caregiver of an individual with Alzheimer’s disease*, highlighted the following: *«We must all **fight for the creation of structures, services and conditions, which improve the life quality** of people suffering from dementia and their caregivers. We must fight for the support of research that is related to this disease, the informing and sensitization of the public, the **protection of human and social rights** of individuals suffering from dementia, as well as the elimination of their stigma and the discriminations they face.»*

A few words about Alzheimer's disease

The causes of Alzheimer's disease are not fully known. In recent years, population studies in Europe and America prove that the incidence of dementia decreases as a result of a change in lifestyle and the control of cardiovascular risk factors.

Alzheimer's disease is characterized by the cerebral deposition of two pathological proteins, namely amyloid β -protein and τ (tau) protein, which cause neuron degeneration in the brain.

The disease's symptoms include: memory disorders, speech disorders, loss of orientation in space and time, and reduction in daily functionality. Moreover, there are changes observed in one's personality, frequent physical disturbances, as well as psychiatric symptoms, such as apathy, depression, aggressiveness, irritability, negative attitude, delirium and delusions. Between the symptoms' onset and the disease's final stages, 10 years on average can go by.

The most significant risk factors, which have been identified, are genetic predisposition and age increase – two factors that cannot be modified. The strictly hereditary form of this disease is rare: it accounts for less than 1% of all patients, and appears in individuals aged <65. The sporadic form of Alzheimer's disease, which appears after the age of 65, has a smaller hereditary burden.

Alzheimer's disease is irreversible and evolves slowly over time. Current drugs (cholinesterase inhibitors, memantine) relieve its symptoms, however, they do not offer complete cure. Non-pharmaceutical treatments (mental strengthening, work therapy, art therapy, e.t.c.) significantly contribute to the improvement of the evolution of all dementia forms.

Additional information:
Reputation Unique, Mrs. Alexandra Skopetea
2155605211 & 6937 307771