

## Maltese Partners addressing the Societal Impact of Pain Symposium join forces

By Gertrude Buttigieg (Malta Health Network), Silvana Fanalista (No Pain Foundation), Joop van Griensven (Pain Alliance Europe), Chris Wells (European Pain Federation EFIC®), Mariano Votta (Active Citizenship Network), Norbert van Rooij (Grünenthal)

Approximately 20 percent of Europe's adult population, more than 80 million people, suffers from chronic pain, meaning pain which occurs repeatedly over a period of three months or longer. This is more than twice the number of patients with diabetes. Some 9 percent of Europeans experience pain very day. The total direct and indirect costs of chronic pain amount to an estimated 1.5 to 3 percent of total European GDP.

"It is of utmost importance to increase the visibility of chronic pain as a medical, economic, and social problem, since it affects quality of life more than most other illnesses," says EFIC President Dr Chris Wells. "Chronic pain affects the quality of life more than many other conditions, and it is the number one reason why people see their doctors. We need to address the huge burden the treatment of chronic pain places on health budgets, but above all the indirect costs arising from lost productivity and incapacity for work." Chronic pain accounts for 500 million sick days a year and is the most frequent cause of early retirement and incapacity for work.

It is against this alarming background that the participants in the platform "Societal Impact of Pain" discussed the socioeconomic implications of pain and policy solutions to this burden for individual and societies at the 6<sup>th</sup> European Symposium "Societal Impact of Pain (SIP 2016): Time for Action" in Brussels. The meeting brought together over 225 leading researchers and specialists in the field of pain, representatives of key European patients' organisations, and policymakers representing 28 European countries.

The meeting had great political interest. Over 20 European Members of Parliament involved themselves in the SIP Symposium 2016 together with senior European Commission representatives. String political support from Malta was given by the European Parliamentarians Alfred Sant, Therese Comodini, Cachia, Miriam Dalli and Roberta Metsola.

In the first half of 2017 Malta will be responsible for the presidency of the Council of the EU. June 8-9 2017 the Societal Impact of Pain Symposium will be organized during the Maltese Presidency of EU Council events calendar. 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 SIP 2017 symposium is co-hosted by the [Malta Health Network](#) and the [No Pain Foundation](#). The pharmaceutical company [Grünenthal GmbH](#) is responsible for funding and non-financial support (e.g. logistical support). In the past the scientific aims of the SIP symposia have been endorsed by over 300 international and national pain advocacy groups, scientific organisations and authorities.

**Silvana Fanalista, President of No Pain Foundation** states: "**This is a great opportunity for Malta** since it will be hosting for the first time all European stakeholders (patients, associations, parliamentarians, citizens...) involved in the important issue of chronic pain. At SIP 2017 delegates shall have the opportunity to discuss issues of fundamental importance for the health of European citizens, finally giving chronic pain its deserved consideration". She added that the chronic pain domain is a complex one, even if everything rotates around the patient, the distress also spreads out to the familial, emotional, social and economic strata; "**Chronic pain not only represents a serious concern related to health and social issues, but also places a huge burden on national economies**".

**Gertrude A. Buttigieg, Honorary Secretary of the Malta Health Network** sees the upcoming symposium as a starting signal for intensive cooperation in between Maltese organisations active in pain care "We really hope that working towards SIP 2017 and establishing solid basis will hopefully lead to the development of cross cutting actions and getting away from the silos mentality".

At July 7<sup>th</sup> 14.00 – 18.00 hrs the Maltese Health Network and No Pain Foundation have invited for a first meeting with the European representatives of the SIP platform and Maltese organisations involved in pain to discuss feasibility of cooperation on Malta and the preparation for SIP 2017.

For more information on SIP on Malta visit <https://www.sip-platform.eu> or contact us on at [sip-platform@grunenthal.com](mailto:sip-platform@grunenthal.com) or in Malta at [info@maltahealthnetwork.org](mailto:info@maltahealthnetwork.org) or [info@nopainfoundation.org](mailto:info@nopainfoundation.org)



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