

FRESH AIR

GREECE

An overview of the FRESH AIR project (February 2016)

We all need healthy lungs to lead healthy, active lives. Yet worldwide hundreds of millions of people suffer from chronic, long term lung diseases. These diseases cause symptoms that can stop people being physically active, prevent them working and make everyday life very difficult. Sadly, every year millions of people also die prematurely from chronic lung diseases. Prevalence of chronic lung diseases in Greece is high and there is evidence this has worsened since the beginning of the economic crisis.

While chronic lung diseases are not curable, with proper treatment the symptoms can usually be managed. However, in Greece awareness, diagnosis and treatment can be difficult to access. Many people are also exposed to smoke from household air pollution that causes lung diseases and makes them worse. This is because they often burn wood or coal inside their houses mainly for heating without proper ventilation. Greece also has one of the highest rates of tobacco use in the EU and WHO figures indicate that 25% of deaths amongst men are attributable to tobacco. However, there are very low levels of awareness about the damage smoke causes to lungs and what can be done, so people are not able to protect themselves and their families. For all these reasons, urgent action is needed to prevent new cases, improve the quality of life of people suffering now and reduce the numbers dying from chronic lung diseases.

FRESH AIR is an exciting new project, funded by the European Commission, which seeks to do just that. Over three years, starting in October 2015, it will explore how to improve the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of chronic lung diseases in countries where there are high rates of tobacco smoking and exposure to household air pollution, where healthcare resources are limited and where people's awareness of the dangers of smoke is low. The project has seven specific objectives:

1. Identify how policy makers and healthcare professionals can provide effective services;
2. Raise awareness of the dangers of smoke so people can reduce their exposure;
3. Develop services that help people quit smoking where resources are limited;
4. Test new easier and cheaper ways of diagnosing COPD;
5. Promote pulmonary rehabilitation, a low-cost treatment that improves people's ability to breathe;
6. Reduce children's risk of lung damage and early mortality; and
7. Generate new knowledge and innovation and sharing this.

The project consists of inter-related activities in four countries: Greece, Vietnam, Uganda and the Kyrgyz Republic. These countries have diverse demographic, geographic, economic, health system and cultural characteristics so the project will generate learning that will be useful in many other contexts. This learning will be widely disseminated nationally, regionally and internationally. A consortium of 14 organisations from nine countries implements the project with the support of a Scientific Advisory Committee made up of internationally renowned clinicians, scientists and researchers.

The FRESH AIR project involves patients, community groups, health care workers, policy makers, and other stakeholders through Stakeholder Engagement Groups in each of the four countries. These stakeholders are essential to provide input on local priorities and other contextual factors that are used in the detailed design of interventions. If you are interested in knowing more about chronic lung diseases and the project, please look at the FRESH AIR website (<http://www.theipcr.org/freshair>) which includes a range of resources and details of how to get involved.

