

*Senior International Health Association (SIHA) expressed their deepest condolences for the 1.5 million European deaths from Covid and honour the 115,000 victims who were doctors, nurses and health workers*

## **International Day of Older Persons**

**Von der Leyen at the SIHA Press Conference: “Care must be not just high quality, but affordable and accessible. Longevity is not only about seniors. It is about all of us”.**

*The video message from the President of the European Commission broadcast at the SIHA Press Conference organised on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons. Adherence to therapy: a new European project by Senior International Health Association and the European Society of Hypertension to investigate the causes of non-adherence and raise awareness among patients*

**Brussels, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021** – “Today, we will focus on two important issues for Europe’s elderly people. **Adherence to treatment and access to care for chronic diseases** such as cancer or diabetes, especially in times of pandemic. I very much agree that care must be not just high quality, but affordable and accessible. This is one of the reasons why I have announced **a new European care strategy**. We want to support all Europeans of all ages in finding the best care solution for their needs. As part of this work, we will also launch a European initiative on long-term care. We will help EU countries reform their national systems for long term care. And for the first time ever, we will focus at the same time on the people in need of care, as well as on those providing care”. This is the essence of the message by the **President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen** at the conference organized by the Senior International Health Association (SIHA) in collaboration with the European Society of Hypertension (ESH) on the occasion of the **International Day of Older Persons** (to watch Ursula von der Leyen’s full video message please [click here](#)).

The **importance of vaccination and adherence to therapy** were the main topics of the conference, chaired by the **Vice President of the European Parliament Fabio Massimo Castaldo**. A minute silence was dedicated to the approximately 1.5 million European victims of Covid and to the 115,000 doctors, nurses and health workers who lost their lives.

Adherence to therapy in Europe is about 50%, with different values depending on the type of disease. Poor adherence is a problem especially among the over 65s, who are the main drug users. **Low adherence in Europe is estimated to cause around 200,000 avoidable deaths and avoidable health care costs between €80 and €125 billion.**

“In Europe we have had about **1.5 million deaths from Covid**, and among these the elderly are the overwhelming majority,” said **Roberto Messina, European President of SIHA**. “Fortunately, seniors responded promptly to the vaccination campaign: 84.5% of the over 60s are vaccinated in Europe counting for over 78.3 million people. This also played an important role in involving the remaining population. However, the pandemic has caused another serious problem, namely the suspension of ordinary care, **the weakening of the relationship with doctors with a consequent decrease in adherence to therapy**. This means

disease recurrence, hospitalizations, loss of treatment effectiveness and hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths. Furthermore, for health services across Europe, non-adherence results in a **waste of resources** that could be reinvested elsewhere. This is why it is so important to turn the spotlight on this issue on the day of elderly people”.

During the conference, the **results of a real-world survey**<sup>1</sup> on hypertension treatment models and adherence to therapy conducted in Italy by Senior Italia FederAnziani (Italian Federation for the Elderly) were presented. They show that thanks to effective and **simplified treatment strategies**, in particular with fixed drugs combinations, there is a significant improvement in adherence to antihypertensive therapy and pressure control in the elderly, which translate into a reduction in morbidity and mortality.

Leveraging this data, ESH and Servier, in collaboration with SIHA **launched a new project to promote adherence to therapy** in hypertensive patients. It starts with a **large survey with patients** in five European countries (France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and Spain). The results will help building a personalized approach of non-adherence to treatment with a special focus on the necessary therapeutic alliance between healthcare providers and patients. The project is possible, thanks to the support of Servier

The survey aims to **understand the psychological aspects of non-adherence** and to improve awareness of the consequences of non-adherence. Following the results, **an education campaign** will be developed to improve adherence through a therapeutic alliance between health professionals and hypertensive patients. The **collaboration with scientific societies and global patient groups** will facilitate the dissemination and communication of the results, promoting the cultural change needed to improve the health of seniors. The project will also contribute to **improve economic planning** and the allocation of resources from the institutions, and to optimize the sustainability of healthcare systems, especially dedicated to the elderly population.

«Hypertension is highly prevalent over the age of 65 affecting more than 60% of individuals in most European countries. A high blood pressure represents a major cardiovascular risk factor, which reduces life expectancy increases the risk of death due to cardiovascular, cerebral and renal diseases. Today, there is good evidence from clinical trials that treating elderly patients with hypertension has a positive benefit/risk ratio even in very elderly patients (>80 years). However, to prevent hypertension-mediated organ damage, **patients need to follow a life-long treatment based on life-style changes and antihypertensive medications**. To achieve an adequate and sustained blood pressure control, a proper adherence to medications is essential. Yet, poor adherence to therapy has been identified as a major factor limiting the benefits of antihypertensive therapies. To prevent non-adherence in older hypertensive patients, it is important to inform patients of the risks of non-adherence and to understand the reasons why patients interrupt their therapies» declared **Michel Burnier, Chairman ESH Working Group on Cardiovascular Pharmacotherapy and Adherence**.

---

<sup>1</sup> Real-world antihypertensive treatment models, adherence to treatment and blood pressure control in the elderly: An Italian hypertension awareness campaign by Senior Italia FederAnziani, the Italian Hypertension Society and the Italian Federation of General Medicine. Rita Del Pinto, Giovambattista Desideri, Claudio Ferri, Enrico Agabiti Rosei, *High Blood Pressure & Cardiovascular Prevention* (2021).

The event was attended by: Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Vice President of the European Parliament; Roberto Messina, President of SIHA; Aldo Patriciello, MEP, European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research and Energy; Danilo Oscar Lancini, MEP, European Parliament Committee on International Trade; Pierpaolo Sileri, Undersecretary for Health in Italy; Maurizio Deplano, Head of Strategy at Senior International Health Association; Giovambattista Desideri, Geriatrics, Lecturer at the University of L'Aquila; Michel Burnier, President of the European Society of Pharmacotherapy and Adherence Working Group Hypertension of ESH; Reinhold Kreutz, President of ESH.