

Engagement Programme: Visit to the Cyprus organisation Cyprus League Against Rheumatism (CYPLAR)

Participants: Prof. Hans Bijlsma, Dieter Wiek

Events:

Thursday, 9 May 2019:

In the morning discussion with the President of the Health Community of the Cyprus National Parliament, Mr. Costas Constantinou and the Members of Parliament Dr. Adamos Adamou and Mr. Prokopis Prokopiou,

and

later in the morning discussion with the Minister of Health Mr. Constantinos Ioannou.

In the afternoon 15:00 – 18:30 Conference «Work and People with Rheumatic Diseases» “DON’T DELAY CONNECT TODAY TIME2WORK”

Saturday, 11 May, 12.00 – 14.00: Opening Ceremony of CYPLAR’s Event for the Annual Awareness Week.

Goals:

- *Raise awareness for people with RMDs to show that they are able to work with a rheumatic disease if they receive the appropriate support.*
- *Collaborate with stakeholders to implement policies to support people to enter/retain the labour market.*

In the **Thursday morning** events with members of the Cyprus Parliament and the Cyprus Health Minister in which Marios Kouloumas, President of Cyplar, Prof. Johannes W.J. Bijlsma and Dieter Wiek the VP of EULAR representing PARE explained the background and initiation of EULAR’s campaign ***Don’t Delay Connect Today*** and then focused on the importance of work. They outlined that it is still difficult in particular for young people with a rheumatic disease to get into work and people to stay at work, if they get a rheumatic disease. Also they stressed out that people with RMDs have long sick leave, or get an early retirement because of their illness which has an impact on the society

They emphasised that with workplace adaptations, working time flexibility etc. a lot can be achieved, and people can stay at work and be productive. Thus not only the individual profits but the whole society and a state’s economy.

The general feeling was that the points put forward were favourably received. The Health Minister, however, replied that the changes at working places are difficult to realise for some employers.



From right to left: Prof. Hans Bijlsma, Marios Kouloumas, the Health Minister Constantinos Ioannou, Dieter Wiek

The **afternoon conference** moderated by Souzi Makri, Vice president of CYPLAR, and Takis Hatzigeorgiou, member of the European Parliament, was co-organized by the Cyprus Employer Federation. The presence of the Minister of Health and the President of Parliament emphasized the importance of work and targeted the different stakeholders.

Prof. Johannes W.J. Bijlsma and Dieter Wiek underlined in their presentations the importance of early diagnosis, access to optimal treatment and stressed the impact of an RMD for the individual and society by providing various European data.

Evridiki Ioannou, a young person with an RMD, presented her personal story in a very impressive and touching way. There was general agreement that workplace adaptations and flexibility enable access to work and support social inclusion for people with chronic diseases and disabilities.

On **Saturday morning** there was an impressive event right in the center of Nicosia that aroused great public interest. After short speeches by Marios Kouloumas, President of Cyplar, Dimitris Sillouris, President of the House of Representatives, Christina Yiannaki, General Director of the Ministry of Health, the Member of Parliament Mr Nicos Tornatidis, the Municipal Councilor of the Nicosia Town Hall Valerios Daniilides, and Dieter Wiek all representatives accompanied by lots of volunteers and Cyplar employees walked through the pedestrian zone holding umbrellas to raise awareness for better health care, access to work and improved working conditions for people with RMDs. The umbrellas bore the inscription of the campaign in English and Greek.



The protective umbrellas signified how the destructive effects of a rheumatic illness can be prevented by an early diagnosis.

Dieter Wiek

VP President EULAR representing PARE