

COVID-19: The challenges we faced as a patient organization and how we overcame them

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Challenges:

Extensive lockdown:

The restrictions put forth from the Greek state limited the ability of all our branches in Athens, Patras, Trikala, Karditsa, Thessaloniki, etc., to be able to have face to face meetings and activities.

Social distancing / Isolation:

All guidelines and safety protocols against COVID-19 were instructing everyone to self-isolate and keep social distancing. This, itself, has been a challenge let alone with people who have already been facing difficulties in socializing due to their physical limitations and difficulties.

Fear of the unknown:

Our organization has been on the receiving end of numerous calls on our helpline and a vast number of incoming messages on our social media platforms from people with RMDs sharing their fears for the situation, their anxiety of what might happen if they get sick with COVID-19, if they lose their jobs, if the situation gets out of control, of what the future will bring, if they have a flare up and they cannot meet with their doctor and a lot of other issues that arose given the whole situation. This was one of the most difficult challenge we had to overcome.



How we managed to overcome the challenges:

Engagement:

Through webinars and online/virtual conferences we managed to offer continuous information and training on issues such as COVID-19 vaccination, new medications, pharmacovigilance, new technologies and RMDs, work and RMDs, fertility/menopause issues and RMDs etc.

Inclusiveness:

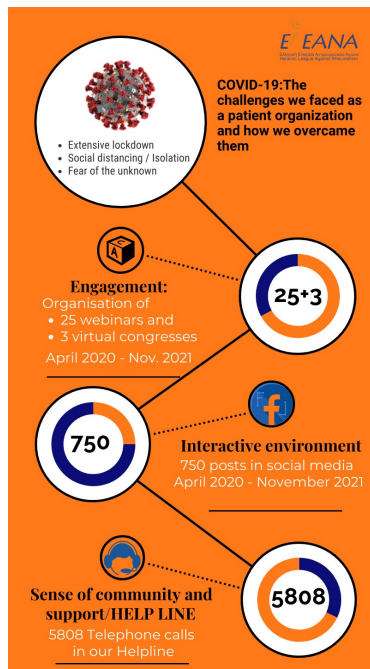
Every person having access to a pc or a laptop or a smartphone could either participate in a virtual conference/webinar and/or watch it on demand afterwards. This made it easier for thousands of people with RMDs to be able to have access to all these information. In the pre – COVID era, people with RMDs even though willing to attend conferences and seminars sometimes physical limitations were standing in their way making it more difficult for them to make it happen.

Interactive environment:

Social media platforms were our first line response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 restrictions. People became more and more interactive, online, thus creating a day to day need for the board members and volunteers of the organization to have a social media presence to be able to answer back questions, to guide and to support all members reaching out.

Sense of community and support:

Our helpline was a first line response to the people with RMDs that reached out to our organization. During this past year we have assigned additional volunteers to help out with load of the incoming calls apart from the mental healthcare professional working for the helpline. Additionally, all branches around Greece have made sure that they are supporting online their own members thus keeping up with everyone and sustaining a sense of community and support.



https://youtu.be/WdGo_jEC9f4