

Fighting malnutrition in Greece: from idleness to mobilization

Key Actions to achieve awareness and new legislation

On behalf of the Board of GRESPEN: Prof. D. Kouvelas (dkouvelas@med.auth.gr) and Dr. M. Chourdakis (mhourd@med.auth.gr, +30 6944315100)



The initiative: To persuade politicians to incorporate changes in the Greek legislation regarding Clinical Nutrition issues. that would be mandatory to be followed in every public hospital. To provide Greek caregivers (doctors, dietitians, nurses, pharmacists) with informational material (e.g. guidelines, modules) in Greek, in a user-friendly and cost-free way.

Rationale / Background

Despite Greece's high «doctors to population ratio», nutritional care to hospitalized patients is not better than in other countries, with malnutrition prevalence rates reaching 40%. One main reason for this, might be the lack of adequate knowledge, resulting in low awareness of nutritional problems among caregivers. However, appropriate treating of malnutrition can avoid knock-on healthcare complications and inflated costs.

Therefore, GRESPEN, focused on **two objectives**:

- **The adoption of new legislation** incorporating needed changes in order to create policies in favor of the prevention of malnutrition.
 - **The rise of awareness** among doctors and other caregivers (dietitians, nurses, pharmacists) regarding malnutrition, through the provision of relevant material and continuous education opportunities. For this purpose, adequate informational material was translated into Greek (ESPEN guidelines, LLL e-topics, ESPEN Blue book, etc.), in order to share the knowledge, with non-English speaking professionals in Greece. This new informational material is now available to be used by practitioners of all disciplines for free at www.grespen.org.
- Additionally, we sought and achieved the collaboration with numerous Societies of various medical professions.

What makes the initiative innovative?

It is the **first time** that any kind of legislation regarding the fight against malnutrition was enacted in Greece! Moreover, **this was achieved at a time when Greece faces such financial and political problems that one could consider that this issue is not a Government priority**. However, the persistence of GRESPEN and our allies, plus the quality of the arguments used led the Government to adopt the legislation.

The new legislation is ground breaking, as it incorporates all established international and national guidelines for the provision of nutritional care. Additionally, our initiative of translating the relevant ESPEN material into Greek and of creating a dynamic web site, which is regularly updated, puts Greece in the select club of the very few countries which actually have such legislation **and** the necessary tools to keep the medical community well informed.

Resources utilized

The initiative was conducted by the members of the BoD of GRESPEN, in close cooperation with the Hellenic Dietetic Association (**PSDD**) and the Hellenic Association of Hospital Dietitians (**PASYNOD**). Meetings with Members of the Greek Parliament and the Ministry of Health and Social solidarity were held, as well as with representatives of local Health Authorities and Municipalities. Together, we worked on the draft of the legislation, providing our experience of the field (hospitals, private practices) and knowledge of the matter, incl. the initiatives implemented in other countries. Media attention was achieved.

- Since 2010, GRESPEN members are participating at the ACCN Courses, gaining further education on how to tackle malnutrition (Ohrid 2010, Sarajevo 2011, Belgrade 2012).
- In 2011 Greece was accepted as a full member at the ACCN.
- The **9th ACCN Course in 2013 (12-14 April) is going to be hosted in Greece** by GRESPEN, giving the opportunity to tens of Greek doctors to participate and in that way become more familiar with adequate nutritional support techniques

- Societies from different specialties, have been approached for collaboration (e.g. co-organization and/or co-hosting of LLL live courses).
Hellenic Society of General Medicine, Hellenic Society for Lipidology, Atherosclerosis and Vascular Disease, Hellenic Society for Atherosclerosis, Hellenic Society for Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacology, Hellenic Association of Hospital Dietitians, Hellenic Society for Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care of Northern Greece, Hellenic Dietetic Association, Hellenic Medical Association, Hellenic Foundation for Gastroenterology and Nutrition (2013)

RESULTS – OUTCOMES: Our achievements

The innovative and strategic Fight against Malnutrition in Greece comprised the following actions:

1. New legislation (for ALL public hospitals)

- Establishment of Clinical Nutrition departments within every public hospital.
- Nutritional Screening, to be performed by Diet Consultation office within hospitals. Practitioners should follow methods based on international guidelines and scientific data.
- Establishment of Nutritional Support Teams (NST) at every hospital. The NST members should have received Post Graduate Clinical Nutrition education and/or have attended relevant live courses.
- The NST should identify and treat those in risk for malnutrition. Actions such as recording drug-food interactions, nutritional intake and adverse effects associated with the intake, digestion and absorption of food should be taken. Specific post-discharge care should be offered to patients in risk for malnutrition.
- National and International Guidelines about Nutritional Support have to be followed.
- Dietitians gain access to the medical record. All data that are relevant to the patient's nutritional support are to be included in the medical record.

2. Informational material in Greek, which included:

- the ESPEN Blue Book (4th edition), +800 pages
- the ESPEN Guidelines (Enteral-Parenteral Nutrition, Pediatric, Other), +400 pages ([link](#))
- the LLL e-modules (1-24, more will follow) +800 pages ([link](#))
- the comparison of the ESPEN-ASPEN-Canadian guidelines for Nutritional Support

3. New website (www.grespen.org)

- We launched a new, modern, regularly updated and easy to use website, offering plenty of information and educational material in Greek, helpful for the Fight against Malnutrition.

4. Continuous education activities

in order to further increase awareness, so that doctors act earlier towards malnutrition, we strongly promoted the LLL Program, which resulted in:

- Greece scoring 2nd worldwide in web-hits at the LLL webpage in 2011 (01.01-31.12.2011)
- More than 120 new LLL registered users from Greece for 2012 so far (01.01-10.06.2012)
- More than 330 unique people to have participated at the 12 LLL's hosted in Greece (5 additional LLL live-courses have been programmed till late September)

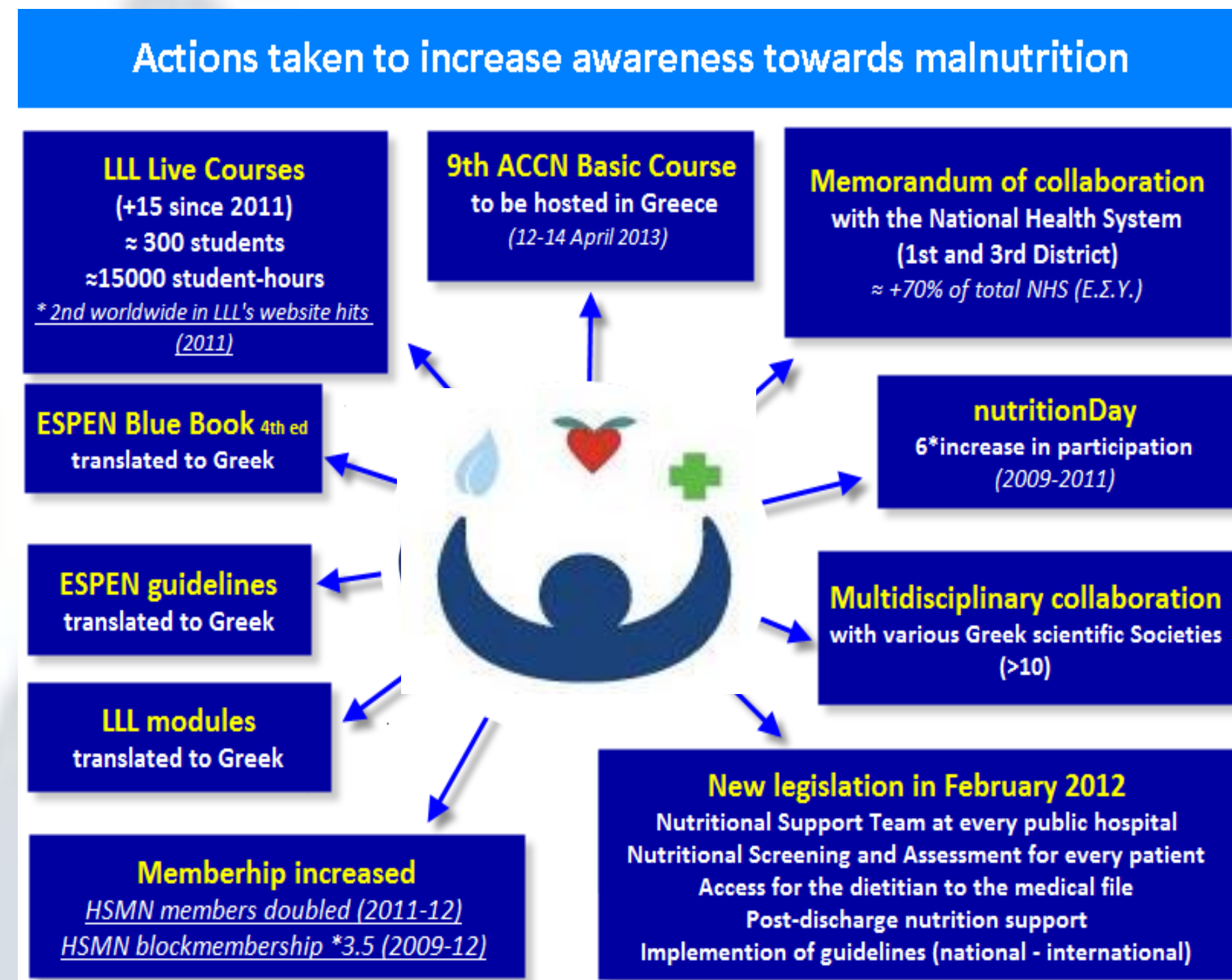


Conclusion

We are happy to **have achieved both targets** we had set when we first initiated the Fight against Malnutrition in Greece:

- The **new legislation** incorporates many of the strategies internationally accepted as effective in fighting malnutrition. Only by achieving the alignment of policy, standards, guidelines and regulations, can the delivery of improved nutritional care be achieved.
- The **availability of quality informational material in Greek** clearly enables a greater number of medical doctors and caregivers in general, to get informed and educated on malnutrition issues.

The well designed, modern and easy to use web site undoubtedly makes the access to the material easier and cost free for all caregivers.



What should follow? Our next aims are:

- Malnutrition screening score has to be accepted as indication for reimbursement of medical nutrition by government and health insurers
- Finalize communication with the National Insurance company (EOPYY) to include all types of malnutrition in the categories to be reimbursed.

Adriatic Club of Clinical Nutrition

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Fight against Malnutrition DECLARATION

GRESPEN, as part of the ACCN, participated at the Consensus and writing of the "THE FIGHT AGAINST MALNUTRITION-DECLARATION", which took place in Belgrade in April 2012. With this, "...Participants urge Government, and local authorities and the broader stakeholder community of professionals, patients, carers, industry and insurers, to work together to actively promote Screening, Awareness, Reimbursement and Education..."

Increased awareness of Greek clinicians

- GRESPEN MEMBERS: **+400%** (in the last 18 months)
- ESPEN BLOCKMEMBERSHIP:
 - 2008-10: 10 in total (previous Greek-Society)
 - 2011-12: >35/annually (**+350%**)
- LLL-webpage hits: 2011 Greece scored **2nd worldwide**
- LLL-live course: >330 unique participants, in >15.000 student-hours
- nutritionDay: 2006-2009: 45 patients in total
2010-2011: >360 patients (**+400%**)

Collaboration with various Societies

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Ministry and Politicians

GRESPEN signed a "Memorandum of Collaboration" with the 1st and 3rd Health District of the National Health System (ESY), which both account, approximately for the 75% of the whole. The Memorandum refers to the scientific coordination to be given by GRESPEN and puts malnutrition issues and nutritional care high in the priorities of the 1st and 3rd Health District, to ensure the delivery of safe nutritional care at a national level.

Medical Students

- We also tried to share this knowledge with medical students, by inviting those who wished to voluntarily offer their assistance in translating the ESPEN material. We also set up a special meeting with all of them on the same topic (regardless whether they participated or not). These medical students are soon expected to act in favor of Nutritional Support.