

Proyecto EPISOUTH
1st EPISOUTH Module
Madrid, 10-14 september 2007
Speech of the director (Intituto de Salud Carlos III)

With shores on three continents, the Mediterranean has long been the basin of trading societies. It is today, one of the biggest tourist destinations and has been described as a “central superhighway of transport, trade and cultural exchange”. Thus past and present have conferred the region a unique identity. More than a geographical or political aggregate, Mediterranean countries share a similar epidemiological profile and tend to face similar problems resulting from their sharing an open space. The Episouth project is based on the latter observation and on the increasing circulation of goods and people, but also health risks brought on by the globalisation process.

During the past decades risks and threats for human health have changed very fast. New diseases with an important health and economic impact, such as SARS, Avian Influenza or Chickungunya virus, surprise us almost every year. Well known and “almost” controlled diseases, such as tuberculosis, re-emerge as potential health threats. Even eradicated diseases, such as smallpox are putting the society at risk we would have never suspected a few years ago.

Natural and man-made disasters are also on the rise.

The response of the health sector to this fast changing world is reflected in the new “International Health Regulations” adopted at the fifty-eighth World Health Assembly on May two thousand and five. As you may know, this new text of the International Health Regulations just entered into force last June.

In this context, the criteria of public health professionals, through a timely risk evaluation of potential health events and threats, is becoming essential for an efficient public health response and for minimizing the negative impact of health crisis.

The access to and sharing of health information of public health interest between professionals, supported by a multilateral approach to risk assessment is probably the most important tool we may think of for anticipating to health threats. It would allow for elaboration of sensitive, useful and timely recommendations helping decision makers at national and international level.

The Episouth project aims at creating the common ground necessary for an operational network of public health professionals and institutions in the Mediterranean Basin and the Balkans. This network may be the basis for improving early warning and response to health threats in the region.

This first workshop of the project, gives a unique opportunity to professionals from more than twenty countries, to exchange knowledge and expertise.

With the support of the European Commission and the Italian Ministry of Health, the Instituto de Salud Carlos III through its National Centre of Epidemiology and National School of Public Health is proud to host this meeting.

We would like to welcome all participants and acknowledge the efforts made to come here, whether from the Eastern Mediterranean Region, Balkans or Southern Europe Region.

Please, make the most of this week and enjoy your stay in Madrid.