



World Hepatitis Day 2009

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World Hepatitis Day 2009: 5 years for the EU to rescue the liver!

Brussels, Belgium – 19 May 2009 – On the occasion of World Hepatitis Day and on the eve of the European Parliament elections, healthcare professionals and patients call on EU decision-makers to make the next 5 years about protecting the liver!

Dr. Heiner Wedemeyer, Secretary General of the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) and Nadine Piorkowsky, President of the European Liver Patients' Association (ELPA) urged EU decision-makers to save the lives of millions of Europeans and **make liver diseases an EU health priority over the next five years:**

"We are witnessing an alarming trend in the number of people affected by liver diseases in the EU: every year, liver cancer causes approximately 700,000 deaths. Hepatitis B and C alone are estimated to affect more than 20 million people in the wider WHO European region and are on the rise in many EU countries" - said Dr. Heiner Wedemeyer, Secretary General of EASL.

'A strong EU voice on liver disease is particularly needed because liver disease is often killing patients "silently": for years, and sometimes decades, patients do not feel the symptoms of their illness and therefore remain undiagnosed until it is too late. Targeted screening of those at risk of catching viral Hepatitis will contribute to defusing this "viral time bomb" and reducing Hepatitis-related morbidity and mortality in Europe' - added Nadine Piorkowsky, President of ELPA and a former Hepatitis C patient herself.

EASL and ELPA call for four key EU measures that should be achieved over the next five years:

- To adopt an **EU Council Recommendation on viral Hepatitis Screening** to further hepatitis prevention, surveillance, screening and care in Europe, promote cooperation among Member States and encourage the adoption and implementation of best practices in the area of liver diseases.
- To increase EU research funding for liver diseases by including adequate calls for proposals on liver diseases, such as viral hepatitis, liver cancer, cirrhosis, fatty liver and others, in the European Commission's **Research Framework Programme**
- To develop and promote **independent public awareness** campaigns aimed at informing citizens about liver disease and how it can be prevented and treated
- To improve monitoring and surveillance of liver diseases in the EU by stepping up the work of the **European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC)**

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THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE STUDY OF THE LIVER



NOTE TO EDITORS

About liver disease

The liver is the body's largest internal organ and is essential to life. It performs over 500 different functions for the body including processing digested food from the intestine and controlling levels of fats, amino acids and glucose in the blood.

The liver's complexity makes it susceptible to many different diseases, including among others:

- *Hepatitis - the most common liver disease which causes inflammation of the liver. It can occur in both viral (e.g. Hepatitis A, B, C, D, E) and non-viral forms (e.g. alcoholic and autoimmune hepatitis) and may result in an acute or chronic condition.*
- *Cirrhosis – the excessive development of scar tissue within the liver which can lead to complete liver failure. This is the result of long-term, continuous damage to the organ.*
- *Fatty liver - covers a range of conditions where there is a build-up of fat in the liver cells. It is caused by certain chemical compounds (particularly alcohol) and by nutritional and endocrine disorders.*
- *Liver cancer - may occur as both primary (cancer that starts in the liver) and secondary (cancer that first develops elsewhere in the body and then spreads to the liver)*
- *Genetic diseases – includes conditions such as Haemochromatosis, Wilson's Disease and Gilbert's Syndrome. Most (but not all) of these diseases are rare (with a prevalence of less than 50 per 100,000 people).*

Although the liver is unique in its ability to regenerate it cannot survive continuous damage.

About EASL

EASL is the leading pan-European association of medical professionals dedicated to promoting liver research and care. Through its work, EASL aims to promote the education of physicians and scientists as well as to improve public awareness on liver diseases and their management. For more information on EASL, see www.easl.ch.

About ELPA

ELPA emerged from a desire amongst European liver patient groups to share their experiences of the often very different approaches adopted in different countries. It was formally launched in 2005 during EASL annual conference and now has 21 members from 17 countries. ELPA's aim is to promote the interests of people with liver disease by furthering awareness and prevention among healthcare professionals, policymakers and the public at large. For more information on ELPA, see www.elpa-info.org.

Further data available at:

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