

EDITORIAL

Mortality reduction in the Russian Federation: Significant progress contrary to Western beliefs

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The South Eastern European Journal of Public Health (SEEJPH) continuously and successfully widens its global outreach especially to the southern and eastern world. Hence, especially in the past years, SEEJPH has placed a major focus on global health challenges and has covered health issues that transcend national boundaries calling for action in the various sectors, which determine the health of populations worldwide (1).

However, the biggest and most important neighbour in the European Region, the Russian Federation, is connected with Western and South Eastern Europe through only a few channels. One of them is the technical cooperation in the framework of the Northern Dimension Partnerships which includes the European Union (EU) member states around the Baltic Sea and Russia as a whole through its bordering North-West district including Petersburg and Kaliningrad (2). The EU and the Russian Federation contribute financially in similar dimensions.

The paper published by Chernyavskiy et al. in the current issue of SEEJPH shows that the Russian Federation has made a considerable progress in the reduction of premature mortality, contrary to western expectations (3). The detailed and robust analysis presented in this article indicates a remarkable reduction of Premature Years of Life Lost (PYLL) for the period 2003-2013 which, assuming the same pace of progress, will eventually lead into a “positive gap ratio” for the year 2020 and

subsequently in 2030. Of note, a positive gap ratio indicates an “on track” status for achievement of the respective Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target (4).

Interestingly, a comparison of regions of North-Western Russia and neighbouring European countries confirmed that the higher the mortality levels the stronger the contribution of avoidable causes. Thus, on average, mortality reduction levels amounted to 50% in North-Western Russia, suggesting an impressive progress. Among other things, this progress is due to increasing investments of the Russian government in the last decade, which have largely focused on the renovation of old health care facilities including purchasing of modern medical equipment for diagnosis and treatment of a wide range of medical conditions (5). Notwithstanding the importance of the healthcare investments in mortality reduction, this is however not the main contributor of the observed health improvements.

Based on these considerations, it is from our point of view extremely important to keep communication channels open between the EU member states and the Russian Federation, at least at the professional and technical level. From this perspective, the paper by Chernyavskiy et al. (3) is timely and very relevant, providing a significant contribution on the understating of the health status progress and achievements observed in the Russian Federation in the past decades.

References

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