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January 8, 2021

Dear Colleagues, dear Friends,

As we enter 2021, we realize we have experienced a year that no one could imagine in January 2020. The SARS-CoV-2 virus has caused a pandemic responsible for an unprecedented health crisis with serious social and economic consequences. Every country in the world has been affected. The pandemic has already claimed more than 1.8 million direct deaths and contributed to hundreds of thousands more deaths in non-COVID patients with chronic and acute conditions poorly treated during the pandemic.

COVID-19 mainly affected the older adults: 80% of people who died from this disease were aged 75 and over, and the excess mortality observed in 2020 compared to 2018 and 2019 mainly concerns this population. Geriatric patients were also the first victims of this pandemic's collateral effects (isolation, lack of regular follow-up, etc.).

Throughout this time, physicians, nurses and all other health care professionals did their best to protect the elderly from the COVID pandemic and its serious complications.

We, geriatricians, have been at the forefront of all these actions in hospitals, nursing homes and in the community, implementing the best possible strategies in this very complex situation.

Since the very beginning of this pandemic, EuGMS has taken action to inform and support European geriatricians and has carried out joint efforts in favor of the older adults. Thanks to the general mobilization of our Society, we actively participated in the debate in order to better understand this as yet unknown disease, which mainly targeted our patients.

Our annual congress in October 2020 has been a key event among our actions throughout this year. Since the start of the crisis, we decided this congress would focus on the COVID pandemic and its consequences upon older adults' health. During the 3 days of our digital congress, more than 2000 participants and experts discussed the medical, public health, social and ethical issues and questions linked to the pandemic: the nature of this disease, the reasons for its serious consequences in the older people, the spread of the pandemic in nursing homes, the failures of public health (in particular of public hospital systems) to deal with the overflow of patients, therapeutic and palliative care strategies, insufficient care of non-COVID patients during this period, ageism issues, health consequences of the social isolation, of the lockdown and of the economic crisis, etc ...

The general situation during the year 2020 has caused frustration, fatigue and exhaustion among all of us. Nonetheless, all of these efforts throughout this period have created very strong bonds between members of EuGMS across Europe. We have shown that solidarity, mutual aid and mutual respect are the pillars of the EuGMS spirit and from this point of view 2020 has been a very rich year.

The year 2021 arrives with many promises. We all know that immunization of the population, especially the most vulnerable persons and health professionals, is the only possibility to significantly improve the current crisis. As mentioned in our latest statement, European geriatricians will play a crucial role in the success of the vaccination campaign launched in most European countries recently.

Through the joint and coordinated actions of Member National Societies across Europe, our Board of Directors, Special Interest Groups, the Global European Initiative, the Young Geriatrician Group and all our members and friends, the European Society of Geriatric Medicine EuGMS will help defeat the COVID pandemic in 2021.

I am convinced that our congress in Athens on October 10-13, 2021 will not only be a great scientific and medical event but also a great celebration that we will all share together.

I wish you a healthy, active and peaceful year 2021.

Professor Athanase Benetos  
EuGMS President