

STOCKHOLM SOCIALISTISKT FORUM 25.11.2018

Good Morning and thank you for your invitation to represent our Metropolitan Community Clinic of Hellinikon in your forum. It is people like you that help us go on.

Our clinic started its operation on December of 2011, a year after Greece requested the help of the IMF and the European Union due to the national debt crisis of 2009 and was the first one founded in the Athens area.

The idea of the clinic was formed as a result of a big demonstrations at the Syntagma square in Athens, the summer of 2011.

It was there, at Syntagma sq., that thousands of people came together, and various ideas were discussed as a way to oppose the memorandum that the Greek government signed in May 2010. A memorandum which imposed strict austerity policies which were already creating many problems to the Greek society. One of these ideas, a little castle of resistance as we like to think of it, was the creation of a Community Clinic that would support all the people that were left uninsured by the economic crisis by and would provide free primary medical healthcare and medicines. This idea came in the mind of Dr. Vichas and a handful of his friends who were demonstrating at the square.

The structure of our clinic is very simple

We are self-governed but we also work in coordination and help other public clinics.

We have no ranks. All major decisions are approved by our General assembly.

We are all volunteers, no one is paid for his/her services and all volunteers belong to a certain team and work accordingly. I.e. We have the team of Doctors, Pharmacists, the Communication team, Organizational team, the secretariat team, the Psychologists team, etc.

Each team elects its representatives which join the coordinating team which oversees the general wellbeing of the Clinic and makes sure that all the decisions made by the assembly are followed to the letter.

They are 11 elected people, who discuss all major pending matters and then they bring these matters to the General Assembly for approval.

If a certain team has a major issue which demands a major decision, then they bring it to the Coordinating Body or, directly to the general Assembly.

The secretariat and the Pharmaceutical depts., work in shifts, and every shift has an experienced volunteer in charge who coordinates the work.

Our clinic has three main restrictions.

1. We do not accept any money from donors. We only accept the equivalent of their donations in medicines, medical materials, children's milk and products, or whatever is necessary for the smooth operation of our clinic.
2. As a clinic we are not involved or support any political parties, although what we do is very political.
3. And we do not advertise the support of any commercial Companies or products.

Not accepting money as donations has empowered our clinic very much because people are invited to come and see with their own eyes where their donations go to, and they become the ambassadors of the clinic, which has created very big support locally and internationally.

At the beginning the main reason that we started our clinic was to help people who were unemployed and had lost their capacity to have access to the National Health system.

Later and as the crisis persisted, there was need that, despite the fact that some people were insured to accept them in our clinic. These were pensioners, people with very low income, as well as handicapped children and patients with special needs for orthopedic equipment etc.

At the beginning we provided help with doctors of almost every specialty, as well as psychiatric and dental services. In total we reached a number of 300 volunteers out of which 115 were doctors, pharmacists, therapists and various other medical specialties.

By 2014 we were helping out 1,500-1,600 persons per month.

At a very early stage back in 2012 we had to face the need to provide milk and child health care, to a vast number of children who were malnutrition. So we expanded our services to this sector, providing immunization, milk, creams and diapers for children up to three years old.

When we opened our clinic December 2011, the National Health system **prevented** people who were unemployed for more than two years, to have access to the Health system. There was a very small number of people who had social welfare (even before the crisis) and these people could get their medicines free from public hospitals, but the majority of the unemployed people had no doctors, no medicines and no access to public hospitals.

By 2013, **3 million** people had no access to the Public Healthcare System

We had to protest and report this unaccepted situation to all the public and European media. The death of one of our patients in the late 2014, who had no access to the National Health System created turmoil.

Slowly the government began to allow certain portions of the population that had no access to medical services to use the services of doctors at the primary public healthcare system.

Due to the political pressure that started to build up, already more than 40 community clinics similar to our own were created across Greece.

Then, in 2014 the Primary National Health system opened to all people.

This meant, that all patients (insured and non-insured) had primary medical help with doctors. But **still** these patients could not find help in our hospitals or free medications.

Finally, in September 2015 the Health system and the Hospitals were open to all patients and immigrants. However, people still have to pay a participation of 25% for medical tests, and for their medicines. If there are no generics for these medicines and if the market price is higher than this of the Approved by the Ministry List, then, the participation is higher. Sometimes is more than 50%. Again, people of low or without income could not face the expenses of their medications.

Furthermore, for people who were in welfare and up till then, could get their free medicines from the Hospitals, now have to pay this difference even though their participation to their medicines, supposedly is zero.

A large list of medicines is excluded from the prescription list and all patients insured and non insured have to pay the original cost, which no matter how small might be, for certain groups of people that is impossible.

I must point here that uninsured people with diabetes still cannot have free needles or measuring tapes and other necessities for their illness.

The cutback in the Health System budget, resulted to a severe deprivation and shortages in medicines and hospital necessities, and maternal and child Health services.

Also, the reductions of salaries of the Health Staff and doctors, resulted to drastic decrease in the number of doctors working in the National Health system, who left the country to serve elsewhere. More than half the doctors, 3 thousand in total, offering their services in the Primary public healthcare system, had to quit their jobs in 2014 because of the "reform" imposed then by government.

As a result, gradually, the health care system had to cope with an extra 3 million people even though half of the doctors had left. Thus, putting a great strain on the already problematic public health care.

Maternal and child health services were cut by 73 percent between 2009 and 2012. The government had also reduced state funding for mental health services by a fifth over 2010–11, and by more than half over 2011–12.

"The Greek health care staff had their salary reduced twice in 2010. Funding of public hospitals, treatment services, diagnostics, disease prevention, all these programs were cut by 20 percent,"

Of course, it was the people again who suffered from these loses, because of the long waiting lists for the public hospitals, long waiting lists for the medical tests and examinations, and shortages in very expensive medicines as are the medicines for chemo treatment etc. for cancer patients

Again, our clinic helped as much as possible, supplying hospitals with materials and medicines, and reporting this situation to the public media and European forums.

Today, after 8 years of hard Austerity, the situation is no better, as far as the availability of Health care is concerned. Although people have access to doctors, in most cases the waiting time and the distance makes it hard for them, - as their income barely permits them - to face the everyday hardships.

For those who have no means to go to the private sector a CT Scan or even a mammography can delay up to a month and for cancer patients who need radiotherapy there is a waiting list of up to 6 months. And this includes patients who also HAVE medical coverage.

All the above make:

- . Our Young people and especially scientists to leave the country.
- . Pensioners to leave the country and to to Bulgaria where the cost of living is lower. And
- . A severe degradation in our life's standards especially for patients who have actually poor nutrition, many of them have no electric power and heating in the winter and this has an impact in their health.

Without the help of people like your selves here today, all over Europe and even further away, the Greek Health Care System would have collapsed a long time ago. An already tragic situation would have become even worst. But it is imperative to note that our clinic is not only fighting to keep all these people alive, we are most importantly fighting to overturn the Austerity Policies

which are destroying the fabric of our society and are driving our young people away. This can only be done with your help, pressuring your government to demand from the European Union to stop Austerity.

We have political statements saying we are through the difficulties of the past and everything is fine, but this is far from the truth, because patients with or without medical coverage have to face the inhuman consequences of the austerity and the restrictions imposed for many years to come.

Our clinic is an example that **we, simple people** have the will and have the power to give vital solutions to the major problems that we face as a nation.