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Can I ask you about your weight? An international collaboration to support obesity-related behaviour change education

E Smyrnakis(1), Kathleen Leedham-Green(2), A Wylie(2), M Chourdakis(3), A Stephenson(2)

(1) Laboratory of Primary Care and GP, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

(2) Department of Primary Care and Public Health Sciences, King's College London, UK

(3) Laboratory of Hygiene, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Corresponding author: Assistant Professor Emmanouil Smyrnakis, Aristotle University Of Thessaloniki, Medicine, Thessaloniki, Greece. E-mail: smyrnak@auth.gr

Background & Aim: Greece is burdened by both financial austerity and some of the highest levels of obesity in Europe. Health promotion is an essential component of a financially sustainable healthcare system, and the role of primary care in prevention but also in the control of obesity is undeniable. However, GP tutors may not feel confident in supporting students to acquire behaviour-change skills. The aim of this study was to empower health promotion issues and enhance behaviour change skills.

Methods: A long-standing association between the medical schools at King's College London (KCL) and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) enabled a GP tutor development session to be delivered to AUTH by KCL through 'webinar' technology. KCL has a mature obesity-related educational programme and the aim was to support the introduction of a similar programme in Greece. Training materials were sent ahead for translation. A programme, similar to that at KCL was subsequently implemented in AUTH. AUTH's academic staff supported discussions on approaches to behaviour change, and on potential barriers to teaching and learning. Students were encouraged to put behaviour change skills into practice by a requirement to write on their experiences with obese patients in practice. A qualitative analysis of these case studies was undertaken to identify both successful learning and ongoing learning needs.

Results: 117 final year medical students discussed obesity with more than 1100 patients in 63 GP settings in Greece during their 4-week placement. Analysis of these case studies illuminates commonalities and disparities between experiences in the UK and Greece that will be discussed in the presentation, and demonstrates a progression from paternalist/consumerist consultation patterns towards a more mutual engagement in health.

Conclusions: The use of internet-based technologies to support international collaboration for teacher development has the potential to reduce the cost and increase the efficiency of curricular developments such as behavioural approaches to obesity.