



Summary of FEAM session “COVID-19 impacts on health” at 9th congress

25 November 2021

The Federation of European Academies of Medicine (FEAM) organised an online session at the 9th Congress of Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Bucharest focusing on COVID-19 impacts on mental health and health inequalities. Three keynote speakers were invited to the session:

- **Professor Stefan Constantinescu**, FEAM President spoke about FEAM and the EU-funded research project PERISCOPE, which seeks to analyse the different impacts of COVID-19 and explore possible policy solutions. Within PERISCOPE, FEAM leads the work on training and education.
- **Professor Giuseppe Costa**, Professor of Public Health at the Medical School of the University of Turin, presented several research findings on health inequalities.
- **Assistant Professor Maria Niemi**, Karolinska Institutet, Department of Global Mental Health, presented the results of a strategic review she undertook within PERISCOPE to systematically assess the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and possible additional impacts from an eventual economic crisis.

The invited speakers were later joined by distinguished academics and public authorities:

- **Diana Paun**, Presidential Adviser for Public Health representing the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis
- **Marco Brambilla**, Professor of Computer Science at Politecnico di Milano, PERISCOPE partner
- **Clare Bambra**, Professor of Public Health at Newcastle University
- **Carmen Cristina Diaconu**, Director of Stefan S Nicolau Institute of Virology, PERISCOPE partner

Some of the topics covered during the panel discussion, and the panellists' views, were:

Health inequalities

Diana Paun highlighted that health inequalities are preventable inequalities, and the right mix of governmental policies should support the society. There is a need to improve equality and access to health care in these challenging times. Periscope trainings that will be developed, in particular the one dedicated to health authorities, should pass on these messages.

FEAM will be starting a new project on how harmonizing EU legislation with respect to health and healthcare to achieve a better and more equal level of medical practice across the EU. This would lead to a constructive dialogue with the EU Commission and relevant stakeholders over EU health integration.

Clare Bambra informed us about the current characterization of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that could now be a **syndemic** or synergistic epidemic, given its aggregation of two or more concurrent or sequential epidemics or disease clusters in a given population with biological interactions, exacerbating the prognosis and burden of the disease. A necessary attention should be given to health inequalities, both in the short-term with vaccine access and in the long-term to mitigate long lasting poverty situations. These health inequalities in poorer areas and ethnic minority areas intersect with lower vaccine uptakes. Using health inequalities lenses could help get a better understanding of



underlying effects and COVID-19 outcomes and find tailored policy interventions, ultimately leading to a fairer society. Health inequalities is a wider issue and should make our societies consider what level of poverty is acceptable.

Mental health

Mental health has been put at risk during COVID-19 pandemic, as shown by the findings of literature review conducted by Dr Maria Niemi et al., with noticeably worse effects for vulnerable population. Increasing the availability, accessibility and sustainability of services is important with regard to the fact that mental healthcare utilization did not increase, despite the growing expected demand. Diana Paun mentioned the poor mental health in young people that have been affected by lockdowns and school closures.

Data and Mis/Dis-information

Carmen Diaconu reminded how data is the key element in health research, specifically when it comes to compare and draw common conclusions from several countries. In addition, good quality data is crucial, but it is important to wait a little more to analyse retrospectively.

Marco Brambilla gave a short introduction on the trainings that will be developed under PERISCOPE umbrella, freely accessible to everyone online in one single place by July 2022. It was reminded how important it is to promote European registries where all relevant information regarding one specific topic is gathered in a joint repository. PERISCOPE does provide this type of services as exemplified by the [COVID atlas](#) which is an online and user-friendly tool to visualize policy measures coupled with COVID-19 outcomes throughout Europe. PERISCOPE is also concerned in the study of such phenomenon of disinformation and misinformation, and how these trends can impact people's behaviours in accessing healthcare and compliance with health measures. Marco underlined evidence about strong misinformation and low vaccine uptake.

For more information:

- PERISCOPE report on [health inequalities with emphasis on vulnerable groups](#).
- FEAM's twitter [thread](#) summing up main messages of the session.
- Presentations of Professors [Stefan Constantinescu](#), [Giuseppe Costa](#), and [Maria Niemi](#).