

## SAFE Regional Meeting in Skopje

---

**7th June 2016, Skopje, FYR Macedonia-** This year's second SAFE regional conference was held in Skopje, FYR Macedonia. Apart from the Macedonian delegation, there were also delegates from Slovenia, Serbia, Poland, Netherlands, Montenegro, Bosnia and Croatia.



The main focus of the conference was placed on the problems of the Balkan countries when dealing with stroke. SAFE delegates from the region emphasized that the main problem at this time is Life after stroke for the patients and their caregivers. As Maja Božinovska from FYR Macedonia stated, the overall number of stroke related deaths in her country is increasing but the survivors do not know how to make the most of their lives after stroke and how to cope and minimise the impact of condition's limitations. The goal priorities for life after stroke should be teaching patients self-management, because 79% of the patients stated that their main problem was self-care e.g. taking a bath, and for 32% was productivity, e.g.

concentration. Self-management enables secondary prevention and impacts modifiable factors, like activity, diet, smoking, drinking, etc.

Apart from self-management, a problem in stroke management is peer to peer support. As Anita Acevska from Macedonian SSO said, stroke has such a great impact on the relationship of the patient with his/her family, who feel uncomfortable because the person they knew „is not the same as before“, so they usually disappear from the survivor's life. So the survivors are left by themselves, and eventually isolate themselves from society, which negatively impacts the recovery. That is why it is important to have more peer support groups who can help survivors and carers adjust to the big changes in their lives.

Also, there is a lack of care facilities and medical professionals for stroke survivors. Nursing homes are not equipped to handle stroke survivors and there are no occupational health therapists. So there is a great need for MDTs since HCPs play an important role in educating, guiding, helping and facilitating self-management.

As for Serbia, the main issue is lack of support groups, i.e. senior clubs, for stroke survivors and the best option would be to „train the trainers“. Lack of funding and no interest from managers in public institutions are the biggest obstacles for helping stroke survivors. The SAFE Board is looking to set up a fund in order to help the support groups get off the ground. In Slovenia, there are support groups but, as Jelka Janša from Slovenian SSO said, there needs to be a wider range of activities for the stroke survivors, from education to rehabilitation, transport, social and a sport activities, creative workshops, etc.

To sum up - the biggest challenge in the Balkans is reaching out to stroke survivors and changing the way people think about stroke. The second biggest challenge is fundraising, because stroke is underfunded compared to other diseases. The third challenge is organisational, e.g. access to facilities, transportation and venues.

As a conclusion, there is a need for a stroke prevention campaign in the Balkans, especially in the rural areas, where workshops could be held on caring for the elderly, and health prevention topics and humanitarian aid could be held. Furthermore, a first aid training for the disabled people should be organized in order to show them stroke survivors how they can help themselves. For the younger target audience, organize self-management and prevention programmes on the internet. But there have to be two approaches, since a large number of stroke survivors do not have access to the internet.