

Aphekom Second Plenary Meeting in Vienna

Interviews performed by Geoff Davies, external communication expert

Videos from May 6-7, 2009

May 6, 2009

Geoff: Hello, my name's Geoff Davies, starting with this first in a group of short videos, I'm going to be interviewing the coordinator of the Aphekom project, Sylvia Medina of the Paris French Institute for Public Health Surveillance.

In separate videos, I'll also be interviewing the project's work package leaders and will ask each of them to explain in a few words the genesis, objectives and expected outcomes of the project itself and of the individual work packages.

So, to begin, Sylvia, can you introduce the Aphekom project to us by describing its key objectives and needs you intend to meet and briefly explaining how you plan to meet them.

Sylvia: Thank very you, Geoff, for your introduction.

First, I'd like to provide a little background on the project if I may.

In 1952, a devastating smog in London killed 4,000 people in just a few weeks from exposure to industrial pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and black smoke.

That episode led European regulators to set standards that have dramatically reduced levels of these pollutants.

Despite these reductions in industrial pollution, however, the levels of pollutants from other sources have increased over time, mainly from road traffic.

More recently the European Commission has introduced standards to limit emissions of other pollutants, like particles, nitrogen dioxide, ozone and others.

But today's reality is that air pollution continues to harm the health of Europeans, shortening their lives by causing some 350 000 deaths annually; triggering asthma attacks in children and adults; and contributing to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, among others.

Geoff: So tell me, why haven't more effective steps been taken to combat air pollution?

Sylvia: I think one reason is that many groups lack the knowledge and understanding they need to address this threat effectively.

These groups include decision makers, health professionals, NGOs, patients' organizations and the general public.

These gaps in knowledge and understanding prevent decision makers, in particular, from planning and implementing measures that better protect public health.

Geoff: Can you give me a few examples of these gaps, Sylvia?

Sylvia: Typical examples of these gaps include:

How many chronic and acute cardiopulmonary diseases could be prevented if fewer Europeans were exposed to air pollution from road traffic?

Or, what are the health benefits and monetary gains achieved from implementing legislation designed to reduce air pollution?

Geoff: So how do you see you as scientists helping to improve the situation?

Sylvia: I strongly believe it is our duty as public-health professionals and scientists to both improve stakeholders' understanding of this threat, and stimulate dialog between them and us.

For this reason, over two and a half years Aphekom's 60 scientists in 25 cities across Europe will develop and deliver new, reliable and actionable information and tools tailored to their needs so decision makers can set more effective local and European policies, health professionals can better advise vulnerable groups, and individuals can make better informed decisions.

Geoff: Is there anything else we should know about your team?

Sylvia: Yes. I want to say how lucky and honored I am to have a dream team of collaborators to work with.

I'd also like to point out that Aphekom builds on the solid foundation of the Apehis network, created 10 years ago. And I especially want to thank the members of our network across Europe with whom I've had the great pleasure of working for so many years!

Last, but not least, I want to welcome all the new Aphekom members.

Now my colleagues will discuss in greater detail the specific work packages for which they are responsible.

But before I want to introduce my co-manager, Bertil Forsberg, and the project's assistant coordinator, Aymeric Ung, my right hand man in this project. Thank you

Geoff: Bertil, would you like to add you own comments?

Bertil: Yes, I'm really glad to be involved in this project. The Apehis project was a success but in this project we will study more health endpoints and use more pollutant indicators. So I think this project will also be a great success.

Geoff: And Aymeric?

Aymeric: Yes, if you would like to have more information on the Aphekom project and send us any enquiry, please go to our website www.aphekom.org. Thank you.

Geoff: *Thank you all.*