

# EUROPEAN HEART FAILURE AWARENESS DAYS 2024

## ACTIVITIES IN SLOVENIA

### 2024 Highlights

- In 2024, Slovenia and Croatia have jointly organized several activities, including media breakfast to launch an educational showcase roadshow about heart failure, that will travel through Slovenia and Croatia in next 12 months, and an international walk that brought together patients, relatives and health care professionals
- *"Detect the undetected: FIND ME" action now supported at primary care level as natriuretic peptides now are reimbursed also at all levels of healthcare; this is a result of a wide initiative (GP's, heart failure specialists) towards insurance company and Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia*
- *Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme new ambassadors*
- *Again, we have mobilized local teams in all 14 hospitals that manage acute admissions, which gives us a 100% coverage of Slovenia*
- *All events had relevant media coverage, with several of them by national media and press agencies*
- *In 2024, The Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme that started in 2017, now has spilled over to Slovenia at large; this is a programme that is supported by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia and serves as a heart failure educational platform for whole country*

### **“NON-FAILING HEART” CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND EMPOWERMENT ABOUT HEART FAILURE IN SLOVENIA**

The Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme (Programme) in Slovenia started in 2017 and is coordinated by General Hospital Murska Sobota (GHMS) and Centre for Health and Development Murska Sobota (CHD MS). In the current, already 3rd three-year period of Programme, Slovenian Society of Cardiology joined the partnership and is, as in previous periods, supported by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia and the City Municipality of Murska Sobota. Activities of the Programme are carried out through the whole year and culminate in European Heart Failure Awareness Days period; in 2024, main focus was on the EHFAD main theme "**Detect the undetected: FIND ME**" and we also included several other aspects as described in this report and at the official website [www.nepopustljivo-srce.si](http://www.nepopustljivo-srce.si) (in Slovene).

Our Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme is generally divided into three sections:

1. Empowerment and education of heart failure patients and their informal caregivers for better self-care and achieving higher health-related quality of life.
2. Awareness raising and education of health experts on heart failure and conducting research in different areas of work with patients and their informal caregivers.
3. “Non-failing Heart” campaign for raising awareness of heart failure on regional (Pomurje region) and national level among general public.

## EUROPEAN HEART FAILURE AWARENESS DAYS 2024

The Heart Failure Awareness Days 2024 were divided in following sets of activities:

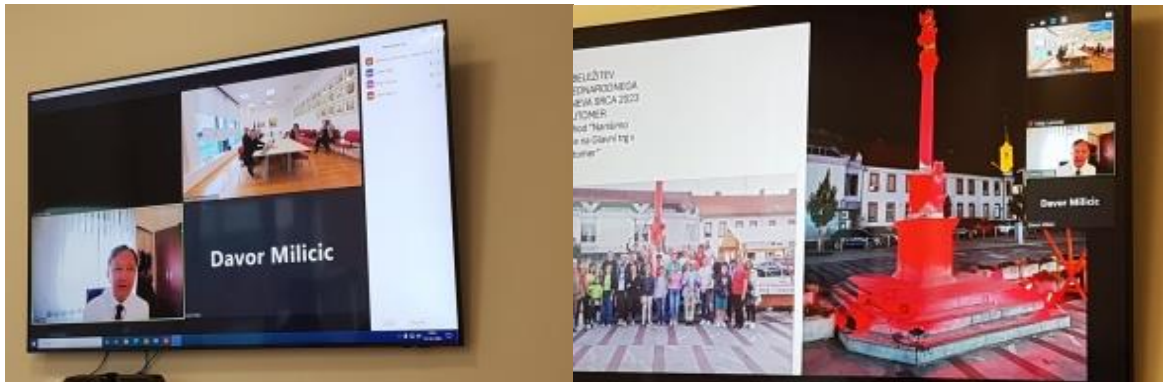
### **1. Media breakfast with medical experts during European Heart Failure Awareness Days "Detect the undetected: FIND ME"**

As an introduction in **European Heart Failure Awareness Days**, the Slovenian Society of Cardiology, hosted on 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2024 a media breakfast in Slovenia's capitol, Ljubljana, with international participation. Speakers presented heart failure from different perspectives and informed the participants about the events that will take place in Slovenia and Croatia as part of the European Heart Failure Awareness Days 2024. They emphasized, that this year's European Heart Failure Awareness Days will take place during the week of 29<sup>th</sup> of April to 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2024 under the slogan "Detect the undetected: FIND ME" and will highlight the importance of early detection of heart failure.

Prof. Dr. Zlatko Fras, President of the Slovenian Society of Cardiology, presented the epidemiological burden of heart failure in Slovenia and worldwide and talked about its treatment. Prof. Dr. Mitja Lainščak made it clear that early detection of heart failure is crucial and outlined the events planned for the European Heart Failure Awareness Days 2024 in collaboration with partners from Slovenia and Croatia. The Programme's partners will create a educational showcase roadshow that will be hosted in all Slovenian hospitals and their local communities. For this purpose, the Programme will equip hospitals with the exhibition, promotional and educational materials for awareness raising and empowerment on heart failure as well as with special EHFAD T-shirts for each member, promoting EHFAD activities.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Vesna Homar presented the results of the research on heart failure in the elderly, while Assist. Prof. Dr. Jerneja Farkaš Lainščak spoke about the Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme, which the partners have been implementing with the support of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia since 2017. Peter Beznec spoke in more detail about the Programme's activities and events for different target groups within the framework of the "Non-failing Heart" campaign. The speakers at the round table were joined by academician Prof. Dr. Davor Miličić, President of the Croatian Society of Cardiology, who presented the activities that will be implemented in Croatia during the week of the European Days of Awareness and Empowerment on Heart Failure 2024. Croatia will also host the aforementioned educational showcase roadshow in the same manner as in Slovenia, sponsored by materials and promotional content of Slovenian Programme.





## **2. European Heart Failure Awareness Days international walk/hike**

As part of the European Heart Failure Awareness Days, partners of the Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme organised and carried out an international walk/hike to Madžerkin Breg on Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2024 in cooperation with the Ljutomer Mountaineering Association, the Bundek Mountaineering Association and the Cipelcug Mountaineering Association from neighbouring Croatia. We started the hike from different starting points, walked over 6 km and had great weather the whole way. More than 50 hikers took part in the hike, about half from Slovenia and half from Croatia, and we quickly got to know each other at the finish line. At the top, we had a healthy snack and marvelled at the beauty of the landscapes of four countries from the lookout tower. We were lucky to attract medical doctors from both sides of the border on the hike with us – with us were Milica Gabor, MD from Croatia and Prof. Dr. Mitja Lainščak, MD and Assist. Prof. Dr. Jerneja Farkaš Lainščak, MD from Slovenia. They gave us a short lecture on heart failure in both languages, which was interesting for all hikers and also other visitors on site. Everyone agreed that we'll definitely do the European Heart Failure Awareness Days Walk again next year!



## **3. Awareness raising and education of health experts on heart failure and conducting research in different areas of work with patients and their informal caregivers**

Within this year's activities on heart failure awareness raising, we participated in a panel discussion at the Regional and Study Library Murska Sobota. Entitled "The role of scientific research in the regional hospital: where are we and where are we going?" the discussion addressed the crucial role of scientific research in the regional hospital. Dr. Albert Halasz from the Regional and Study Library Murska Sobota welcomed the participants. The discussion evening was expertly moderated by Assist. Prof. Dr. Jerneja Farkaš Lainščak, Head of Research at General Hospital Murska Sobota. The panel included Prof. Dr. Borut Jug (University Clinical Centre Ljubljana, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana), Prof. Dr. Sebastjan Bevc (University Clinical Centre Maribor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Maribor), Prof. Dr. Mitja Lainščak (General Hospital Murska Sobota, Faculty of Medicine,

University of Ljubljana), Prof. Dr. Mitja Slavinec (Pomurje Academic and Scientific Union) and Peter Bez nec (Centre for Health and Development Murska Sobota).

The speakers confidently addressed various professional topics related to the work of researchers in the healthcare sector. They highlighted different aspects of research work, the opportunities for networking with partners at international, national and regional level, and the role of systematically organised research activities in healthcare institutions. In their concluding reflections, the speakers expressed their commitment to continue working together in the future. The evening concluded with a joint visit to an exhibition on the activities of scientific research at General Hospital Murska Sobota. This was prepared by Assist. Prof. Dr. Jerneja Farkaš Lainščak, Dr. Albert Halasz and Matej Končan. The exhibition also presented the activities of the Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme. It was on display in the lobby of the Regional and Study Library Murska Sobota for two months.



#### ***4. Raising awareness on heart failure and empowerment of patients and their informal caregivers***

Earlier this year, as an introduction to EHFAD, we held a promotional event at the Šalovci Cultural Hall to launch a health literacy survey among the population of the Municipality of Šalovci, entitled “Non-failing Heart”. The event was kicked off by Peter Bez nec, Director of the Centre for Health and Development Murska Sobota, which is the lead partner of the Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme (hereinafter: the Programme). On behalf of the Programme's expert partner, General Hospital Murska Sobota, Prof. Dr. Mitja Lainščak, MD, PhD, delivered an inspiring address to the audience, emphasising the crucial role of the professional public in the management of heart failure and the importance of health literacy for patients. The audience was also welcomed by Ms. Tatjana Krajnc Nikolić, MD, from the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), Regional Unit Murska Sobota. She emphasised the importance of cooperation between the Regional Unit of NIPH and the local community in the implementation of various activities in the field of public health. The Mayor of Šalovci, Mr. Iztok Fartek, also addressed the participants and welcomed them. He praised the excellent cooperation with health institutions in the local area and encouraged everyone to get involved in the many health promotion activities taking place in the municipality. After the welcome speeches, the first presentation was delivered by Assist. Prof. Dr. Jerneja Farkaš Lainščak, MD, PhD, Head of Research at the General Hospital Murska Sobota. Her presentation, entitled the Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme showed new epidemiological data on cardiovascular diseases and specifically spoke about the burden of heart failure. She also presented some of the most high-profile actions that have been carried out over the past seven years of the Programme, as well as the promotional materials that have been issued in the framework of the Programme and that participants could take home with them. Finally, she invited all the participants to participate as actively as possible in the various events that we

are planning in the future within the Programme. Next, Prof. Dr. Mitja Lainščak, MD, PhD, from the General Hospital Murska Sobota, presented the characteristics of heart failure and explained what patients suffering from this disease have to face. He was passionate about the importance of informal caregivers and regular implementation of self-care behaviours for heart failure patients in the home environment. He also presented the activities carried out by health professionals in outpatient clinics where they follow up heart failure patients. His presentation also touched on the importance of raising awareness of the disease among the general population through such and similar promotional events.

The topic of health literacy in Slovenia was presented by Asst. Sanja Vrbovšek from the Centre for Management of Prevention and Health Promotion Programmes of the National Institute of Public Health. She first presented the definition of literacy and types of literacy, with a focus on health literacy. She gave practical examples of individual health literacy, population health literacy and presented the results of the National Health Literacy Survey of the adult population of Slovenia to the gathered participants. The survey took place in 2020 and was part of the larger European Health Literacy Survey, which was conducted in 17 countries of the WHO European Region within the M-POHL network. In her presentation, she particularly stressed the importance of digital health literacy, which is gaining importance due to increasing digitisation, but which requires attention to finding relevant information and data, which is an increasing problem in the flood of various publications, especially on social networks. At the end of the promotional event, Drago Lainščak, who is completing his master's degree in health sciences at the Alma Mater Europaea in Maribor. He presented to the gathered participants of the event some statistical demographic and health data related to the Municipality of Šalovci and the questionnaire that will be filled in by all the participants of the study. The questionnaire consists of four topics and is comparable to the questionnaire used in the national survey, which will also allow comparing the results obtained with the results of the national survey.



##### **5. Promotion of Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme ambassadors**

In preparation of EHFAD 2024, the new Programme ambassadors were introduced and promoted on the renewed official website (<https://www.nepopustljivo-srce.si/zivljenje-s-srcnim-popuscanjem>), supported by the social media campaign and acknowledgement at national and local level. The ambassadors are representatives of national and local authorities, civil society organisations of target groups and representatives of patients and informal caregivers and are very important link between experts and general public. Their roles are in informing and motivating target groups and general public to take part in health promotion and prevention programmes. In the new Programme period we are proud to introduce two new ambassadors. The first is Mrs. Nina Žitek, president of Slovenian Society Transplant (<https://www.transplant.si/#Zacetna>), a society for organ and tissue transplant patients, their relatives, healthcare professionals and others, as a representative of patients on a national level. The second new ambassador we introduced in this period is the new mayor of Murska

Sobota, Mr. Damjan Anželj. We are also very proud to announce, that one of our ambassadors, Dr. Aleksander Jevšek, assumed new position, from being the mayor of Murska Sobota, to currently holding a position as a Minister of Cohesion and Regional Development in the Government of Republic of Slovenia. On the other hand, we are also sad to announce, that one of our most vibrant ambassadors, Mrs. Angela Novak, President of Association of Retired Persons of Murska Sobota, has deceased in 2023.



Current Ambassadors in Programme are:

**Aleksander Jevšek**, PhD, Minister of Cohesion and Regional Development in the Government of Republic of Slovenia;

**Dejan Anželj**, Mayor of City Municipality of Murska Sobota, representative of local authorities;

**Vijola Bertalanič**, former president of Alliance of Associations of Retired Persons of Pomurje, representative of civil society organisations of target groups;

**Nina Žitek**, the president of Slovenian Society Transplant, representative of civil society organisations of target groups;

**Ema Mesarič**, retired nurse and representative of informal caregivers (daughter of heart failure patient).



## **6. Research activities**

Our Programme is a combination of promotional, educational and research activities. In this period, we have also engaged in a multitude of activities in the research field.

As part of the visit to the Heart Failure Outpatient Clinic, a survey on fluid balance management is conducted using the English translation of the questionnaire "The Thirst Distress Scale for patients with Heart Failure - TDS-HF". This survey is also conducted during the process of hospitalisation of a heart failure patient and then again after a six-month period, when patients are surveyed again.

Similarly, we conduct interviews with heart failure patients to assess their appetite levels using the Appetite Scale-LSA and to determine whether appetite is a direct determinant of weight loss using the English translation of the questionnaire "The Council of Nutrition Appetite Questionnaire - CNAQ". During hospitalisation, heart failure patients also have their body composition measured. The survey process commenced in the previous cycle of the Programme and was concluded at the beginning of this year. A total of 53 patients hospitalised at General Hospital Murska Sobota for acute heart failure (new-onset heart failure or exacerbation of chronic heart failure) were included. The CNAQ questionnaire was employed to gather data on the appetite of hospitalised patients with heart failure. Of the patients surveyed, 42% reported an average appetite, with the majority consuming three meals per day. Upon analysis of the data, it was found that 64% of patients exhibited a poor appetite and a significant risk of losing at least 5% of their body weight over the next six months. Patients with poor appetite were older, had a lower body mass index, more depressive symptoms and poorer nutritional status. The MNA questionnaire, a two-part questionnaire with 18 questions, was used to obtain information on the nutritional status of patients with heart failure. In addition to the nutrition-related questions, the questionnaire also includes anthropometric measurements for heart failure patients. The analysis of the questionnaire yielded the following data: 45% of hospitalised patients had a normal diet, 47% were at risk of malnutrition, and 8% were malnourished. Poorer appetite was observed in both inpatients with acute heart failure and outpatients with stable chronic heart failure, with the exception that inpatients exhibited an even worse appetite. Furthermore, the data obtained from the questionnaires were compared with each other, and it was found that a better appetite in the patients included in the study contributed to a better nutritional status. Although a poorer appetite is recognised in older patients with heart failure, it is necessary to recognise a poorer appetite in all age groups of patients with heart failure.

Additionally, the body composition of hospitalised patients was analysed by measuring body composition using a bioimpedance device. A total of 44 hospitalised heart failure patients were included in the study. Based on the data obtained from this analysis, it was found that a higher body mass index (BMI) was associated with a better appetite.

It is similarly vital to emphasise the process of structured and planned health education and the work of health personnel, who can prevent and treat malnutrition in patients through early detection and appropriate treatment. In the case of malnutrition, appropriate nutritional support and holistic management of the patient, involving an interdisciplinary team of health professionals, are of great importance. Health education begins in hospital, but it must also continue in the outpatient setting, as this allows patients to renew and improve their knowledge, thereby making it more useful. Indeed, evidence suggests that effective health education can reduce hospital readmissions and enhance patients' knowledge of heart failure and self-care behaviours. It is also beneficial to engage relatives and informal caregivers of patients with heart failure in the health education process, as they play a pivotal role in supporting heart failure patients in the home environment, monitoring appetite and nutrition, and actively participating in improving these aspects.

## **7. Media campaign during European Heart Failure Awareness Days**

The second set of activities was a launch of intense media campaign about European Heart Failure Awareness Days and about the past and present activities of our Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2024, the radio Murski val hosted the programme "For Health", where the Assist. Prof. Dr. Jerneja Farkaš Lainščak, MD, PhD, presented the content of the Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme and the activities that will take place during the European Heart Failure Awareness Days 2024.

We used the Programme's website [www.nepopustljivo-srce.si](http://www.nepopustljivo-srce.si) to publish articles on all the events carried out during the third project period

We also prepared posts on each of the activities of the for the Facebook profile *Nepopustljivo srce* (Non-failing Heart).

During European Heart Failure Awareness Days, articles about our activities were published by the Slovenian Press Agency, the Lokalec web portal, Megafon, Vestnik and Telex. SI21 and Preberi.si.

Articles marking the European Heart Failure Awareness Days were also published in the ZIB Bulletin in issues 6108 and 6112 in April 2024.

At the same time, we launched a social media call to join our heart failure awareness activities in our Programme to general public and civil society groups.

We have reached over 10.000 people on social media and over 100.000 people through posts on various web portals (Slovenian Press Agency, SI21, Telex, Preberi.si, Vestnik, Pomurec, Municipality of Šalovci, Megafon, Lokalec,...) and Facebook profiles (Centre for Health and Development Murska Sobota/On the move Slovenia, General Hospital Murska Sobota, Municipality of Šalovci, Murska Sobota Regional and Study Library and Cipelcug Mountaineering Association from Croatia). We also announced the Pannel discussion and the opening of the exhibition on the scientific and research activities at the General Hospital Murska Sobota for the employees of the General Hospital Murska Sobota through the internal newspaper *Modri dirkač*. Two articles on the European Heart Failure Awareness Days were published in the ZIB Bulletin.

## **8. European Heart Failure Awareness Days activities in Slovenia at large**

Slovenia has a network of 14 hospitals that manage acute admissions in medicine. The Heart Failure working group at the Slovenian Society of Cardiology is composed in a way that every hospital has a member (usually senior physician with expertise in heart failure), who is supported by a younger person (resident, young cardiologist) with interest in heart failure.

Every year, all hospitals organize activities during EHFAD in their local environments and everybody who is involved is dressed in same T-shirt that promotes the EHFAD and related activities.

This year, local teams have organized:

- "Heart failure school" – organized for in- and out-patients; is based on same template (powerpoint slides, brochures, short videos); from early starts few years ago, this



education now has spilled-over to continuous education that is delivered 1-2/week in >50% of hospitals, in the rest mostly for outpatients when visiting the clinic

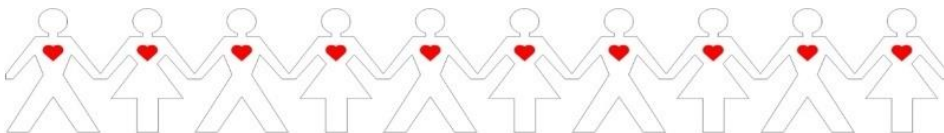
- Basic life support for lay public, in collaboration with local firemen and police departments
- Open-day clinic for lay public
- Heart failure promotional stands, usually in areas where people like to hang out (parks, libraries, galleries, primary schools), with educational activities about general cardiology and heart failure
- Educational lectures in collaboration with Coronary clubs (in Slovenia, there is a network of peer supported organisations – coronary clubs – people with coronary artery disease have regular supervised physical activity and are supported by the health care professionals <https://zkdks.si/>)
- Debates, interviews, TV and radio shows, presentations in local and national media



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With kindest regards,

The Heart Failure Awareness and Empowerment Programme Team Slovenia



PROGRAM OZAVEŠČANJA IN OPOLNOMOČENJA O SRČNEM POPUŠČANJU