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Taking action to increase the public knowledge and epidemiological data on neglected infectious diseases: experience from HERACLES Project in Romania

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Background: The neglected status of cystic echinococcosis (CE) is due to its unknown real prevalence, despite the fact that it remains endemic in southern and Eastern European countries. Ensuring country commitment, from the local populations, but also from the governmental one, represents a challenge to be further addressed. Romania, as partner of the HERACLES collaborative project, stands as an example of progress in the understanding CE epidemiology.

Material/methods: The selected rural areas for the intervention were chosen based on the existing case reports from the medical literature and records of Colentina Clinical Hospital. The population was informed about prevention and control measures of CE, using interactive presentations. Work Package 1 of HERACLES project focuses on ultrasonographic screening and serologic tests, which will allow the understanding of determinants for CE infection.

Results: A total of 7.469 participants to the study were screened for liver cysts of hydatidosis, during different field activities, from 2014 to 2015. The ultrasound surveys were conducted in 5 counties (Arges, Braila, Giurgiu, Neamt, and Vaslui) out of 42 districts of Romania. We observed that people with a low education level have at-risk behaviour for contracting CE and tend not to apply preventive practices. We recorded 126 cases. Most of the cysts were localized in the liver. Data regarding the dimension, WHO classification, and co-morbidities, will be presented. All suspected CE patients were invited to our clinic in order to perform more tests, establish the positive diagnosis, treatment and follow-up. The data collected are used to create surveillance registers in our country.

Conclusions: These actions represent a step towards a national and international health coverage program for neglected diseases. HERACLES project managed to perform interventions in targeted endemic regions with an educational impact, too. To obtain a better control of the disease, informational campaigns should be carried out, in order to increase the awareness among the rural population.