



PRESS RELEASE

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European Conference of Health Journalists

110 health journalists academics and students of journalism from 12 countries in Europe met up in Athens' glorious Acropolis Museum on October 15 to hear the results of a unique 2-year EU-funded project. They gave a warm welcome to calls for the basic skills and knowledge of health reporting to be incorporated into the curriculum of all accredited and other journalism courses at universities and colleges in every country.

Additional papers and contributions from leading health journalists in the USA, Ireland, Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Romania, UK and Portugal followed on the opening introductions which outlined the work of the six partner organisations in the Greek-led **HeaRT (Health Reporter Training) project**.

In each partner country (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Romania and United Kingdom) research and surveys of health journalists have helped to determine what training facilities and resources already exist, and to plan a series of training events which were offered free of charge to health journalists, educators and students.

Basic course materials have been translated into each partner country's own language, and posted online in an e-learning tool to allow interested journalists to register, log in free of charge and access the information that interests them: <http://www.project-heart.eu/index.php/projectheart/tools/elearning>.

There was widespread concern that the pressures and constraints on journalists in increasingly thinly-staffed newsrooms combined with the widespread lack of any specific training on health reporting has left it up to individual journalists to find their own way around a complex and wide-ranging series of issues.

And unlike other topics, misleading reports on some health issues can trigger panic, or even potentially impact on the behaviour of large numbers of people, putting health at risk. And the role of the news media in conveying accurate and timely information was underlined towards the end of the conference by Germain Thinus, a policy advisor to the European Commission, concerned with Health Security and the swine flu panic of 2009.

British partner, John Lister, of Coventry University, said:

"The conference was a great success. But the project's success raises the question of how to build on the work it has done. The HeaRT project team has agreed to investigate ways of continuing the project, hopefully widening its reach to new countries, adding new training materials, and developing the first-ever book on health journalism in Europe, to be published next summer."



In the UK the project will conclude with an Info Day on Wednesday October 31, including a lunch-time meeting in Coventry University and an informal meeting to be held in the evening in London.

The Coventry meeting, which will offer sandwiches and light refreshment, will be from

**12.30pm in the Ellen Terry Building,
Jordan Well CV1 5RW (Room ET103).
All welcome.**

The London meeting will be from

**6.30-8.30pm in the King's Fund building,
11-13 Cavendish Square,
London W1G 0AN (tube Oxford Circus).
Refreshments, including wine, provided.**

Health reporters and editors, and students of journalism are invited to attend – please contact John Lister (j.lister@coventry.ac.uk) to confirm your place.

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