

When the body becomes the issue

1ST INTERNATIONAL HEALTH FILM FESTIVAL
‘IPPOKRATIS’ OPENED ON THE ISLAND OF KOS

We've all been in this kind of situation: During a pleasant evening with friends, the conversation turns to the subject of a friend or acquaintance facing serious health issues. Not long passes before someone asks: "Can we change the subject, please?"



Warning on daily aspirin regimen

HEALTHY people who take aspirin to prevent heart disease may be doing themselves more harm than good, research shows.

Scottish scientists told a meeting of heart specialists in Spain yesterday that although many "worried well" take an aspirin a day, a study of more than 3000 men showed it did not significantly reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.

They also found that it almost doubled the risk of being admitted to hospital because of internal bleeding.

Professor Gerry Fowkes, of Edinburgh's Wolfson Unit for Prevention of Peripheral Vascular Disease, said the research showed the blood-thinning drug should not be prescribed to the general population.

"Aspirin probably leads to a minor reduction in future events, but the problem is that has to be weighed against an increase in bleeding," he said. "Some of that bleeding can be quite serious and lead to death."

At least six previous studies have indicated that frequent doses of aspirin could lower the risk of heart attacks. The Edinburgh study looked at 3350 patients aged 50 to 75 who were thought to be at risk of heart disease but had not showed any symptoms.

Over eight years, 181 of those taking a daily aspirin dose had heart attacks or strokes compared with 176 who were taking placebos.

There was no difference in the rate of heart attacks or stroke between the two groups, and deaths from any cause were similar.

However, there were 34 major bleeds in people taking aspirin compared with 20 among those on the placebo.

The director of Melbourne's Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute, Garry Jennings, said the research was not likely to change practice in Australia because it was too small to be statistically significant.

"Aspirin, like any therapy that reduces the risk of thrombosis, also makes bleeding more likely," he said.

"In healthy people the balance of risk and benefit is close to even. In those with a history of heart disease the balance strongly favours benefit."

Professor Jennings said that in Australia, aspirin was recommended for people with a history of heart or vascular disease, but not for otherwise healthy people.

Health issues are unpleasant, off-putting, almost taboo and not to be mentioned.

Only a few years ago, people with physical and mental disabilities in Greece were often a source of shame to their families, while words like "cancer" were frequently replaced – even nowadays – by phrases like "that horrible thing." It is understandable, therefore, that the gamble taken by the municipality of the island of Kos and director Lucia Rikaki in organizing the 1st International Health Film Festival "Ippokratitis" is of great importance. The festival runs on the island until September 6.

The films scheduled for screening on the island of Hippocrates essentially pose a timely, not to mention delicate, question: What happens when our body, the one we have always taken for granted, suddenly becomes – whether by its own devices or due to a cruel twist of fate – the central issue? What separates an ailing, hospitalized person from the healthy relative, companion or



'Triage: Dr James Orbinski's Humanitarian Dilemma,' directed by Patrick Reed and 'In Gaza,' directed by Andreas Thomopoulos, are two of the films participating in the Kos festival.

friend sitting next to them, holding their hand? How valuable is a person's willpower but also the power of love, solidarity, companionship – or are all these one more romantic, idealized, rounded version of human tragedy and vanity?

Plenty of questions will be posed through a series of outstanding as well as singular documentaries exploring difficult subjects. The festival includes 85 films (all recent pro-

ductions) stemming from 31 countries, on the subject of health and mankind. On the Greek front, 12 films are participating in the competition section, while another eight will be screened in the Panorama section.

Expected in Kos are Greek and foreign directors as well as people representing the festival's films, all of whom will meet with the public and answer questions. All screenings will take place at the municipal, open-air Orfeas Municipal Theater in Kos town.

A number of participating films will be like a slap in the face – in Geoffrey Smith's "The English Surgeon," a British doctor travels frequently to Ukraine for pro bono work, struggling with moral and ethical questions all along – while others offer subtle humor along with a glimmer of hope, exuding a paradoxical notion: the idea that illness can bring out plenty of life.

For more information on the event, visit www.healthfilmfestival.gr.

H1N1 Vaccine to Be Approved in October



The National Committee on Flu Pandemic, which met on Monday under the chairmanship of Health Minister D. Abramopoulos, has ruled out a major outbreak of the H1N1 virus as there is a long summer period in Greece. Mr. Abramopoulos described the new flu as *úmoving sandí* as scientists are not yet certain on the effectiveness of the vaccine and recommendation of groups that need vaccination. In Greece 9 serious H1N1 cases have been confirmed while the virus has killed 2.185 worldwide.

Health Minister D. Abramopoulos said that the European drug Organization is expected to approve the swine flu vaccine in October while Greece would receive first supplies in mid September.

Mr. Abramopoulos said that IKA has opened 158 vaccination centers and 100 flu outpatient centers. He also announced the setting up of three special committees to supervise measures

for the peoples' protection from the flu. So far 1.839 cases have been recorded of whom 43 seriously but 37 have already recovered.

According to statistics 1/100 patients gets admitted to hospital and 95% have escaped danger. Mr. Abramopoulos repeated that schools will open on the regular date and conveyed the scientists prediction that there would not be a major flu outbreak as winter sets in late and does not last long in Greece.

SYN Party

In its statement SYN party said that the emergency situation in schools in view of the flu pandemic has brought to surface inefficiencies specifically in school medical services and inexistence of an integral Health and Prevention Center in Greece. Low budget for state and social services of vital importance are the cause of the present problem. The responsibilities of both ND and PASOK parties are enormous.