

Croatian Hypertension League. Hunt on a Silent Killer

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The Croatian Hypertension League was established with the aim to improve awareness on arterial hypertension in general population (and in scientific and professional community) trying to decrease prevalence of arterial hypertension and increase control of treated hypertensive patients (<https://h-liga.hr/>). Arterial hypertension is the most prevalent non-communicable chronic disease and increased systolic blood pressure is the most important risk factor for mortality worldwide. Unfortunately, in last decades the prevalence of this disease/risk factor is increasing despite the fact that it could be prevented. This is reflection of the life style of western civilization: sedentary life style, poor and too salty diet, obesity, smoking, stress... In the Croatian Hypertension League, the most important risk factors that could be prevented are named “demons of hypertension”: obesity, smoking, lack of physical activity, too salty diet, and insufficient ingestion of fruits and vegetables. These five demons should be in the focus not only for the primordial and primary prevention but also for the secondary prevention. In treated hypertensive subjects they are frequently associated with poor adherence to drug therapy and unprecise measurement of blood pressure making them all together “seven mortal sins of hypertension”. For solving such prevalent and complex disease that is the most important health problem globally, multidisciplinary approach is necessary. Therefore, the most relevant professional societies and associations of physicians are partners and active members of the Croatian Hypertension League (hypertension, cardiology, nephrology, neurology, endocrinology, phar-

macology, public health, epidemiology, family physicians...). Furthermore, associations and chambers of nurses, pharmacists, kinesiologists, nutritionists and many others are members of this strong network under the umbrella of the Croatian Hypertension League. They all working together but also at each of their local actions, emphasizing the importance of Hunting and raising awareness to the general public about the dangers of undetected and untreated/uncontrolled hypertension and healthy life style. Hunt on a Silent Killer is a public health project of the Croatian Hypertension League(<https://tihuvojica.hr/>). The initiation of the project was multi-faced motivated. *First* of all, the motive was to increase public awareness of hypertension as the most important cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and kidney risk factor, clue that is mostly unknown in general public, but also still neglected in a part of the scientific community. The *second* motive was aiming to deliver preventive and educational content to healthcare deprived areas in Croatia such as Banija, Lika and remote islands. Large multidisciplinary team is going to these places examining population by measuring blood pressure, arterial stiffness, central aortic pressure, ECG, drawing blood and collecting urine samples for determination of all biochemical risk factors, thyroid gland ultrasound, and organizing workshops for pregnant women, for mental stress etc. *The third*, but not less important aim was to empower and educate young medical students of finishing years of Medical Schools, recently graduated physicians, but also pupils and students of schools for nurses and medical technicians.



Blood drawing



ECG laboratory in Prnjavor Čuntički



Education in the corridor



Measurements and education



Measurements of central blood pressure



Thyroid gland ultrasound

Unfortunately, during three years of COVID pandemic, on-line teaching and epidemic restrictions band student from teaching clinic centers disabling true clinic education. This led to horrific fact that young doctors have not touched or seen patients for years! Actions of Hunt on a Silent Killer were the first contact with real person, first blood pressure measurement beside short propaedeutic curriculum and first health consult of individual.

The first field activities of the Hunt and the launch of the project took place in the summer of 2021 when the first 30 young colleagues were sent by boat Nikola on the first independent Hunt among the central Dalmatian islands. Previously, colleagues received extensive education on blood pressure measure-

ment, ECG imaging, blood samples and giving health advices. They had mentors, older members of the League and were in touch by zoom. From the recorded materials, as well as the collected data, a short documentary film was created, which was primed at the Faculty of Medicine in Zagreb (<https://vimeo.com/696465118/60651bef8d>). In addition to students from School of Medicine University of Zagreb, young colleagues from all other Croatian universities joined the Hunt from the beginning, making the Hunt on the Silent Killer a real national project. The hunters' next action was on the earthquake-hit and devastated Banija in the spring of 2022, where over 200 of the most vulnerable people, residents of container settlements, were examined

over two days. During the summer 2022, young Hunters were sent to the farthest inhabited Croatian island-Lastovo. There, over five days, they examined more than half of the island's total population. Last autumn, preventive examinations and public health education were provided to the workers of the PIK Vrbovec meat industry. The company PIK Vrbovec is recognized by the Croatian Hypertension League as a role model company due to its reduction of the salt content in all its products.

The happiness and satisfaction of young colleagues is the greatest reward for the effort invested by all actors of the Croatian Hypertension League. Their enthusiasm and desire to learn and help our deprived citizens was also recognized by the University of Zagreb. This year, the Student Section for Hypertension School of Medicine University of Zagreb received the Rector's Award for Community Service, which gave young colleagues even more incentive to continue. The new Hunting action is planned for spring 2023 in Lika and Gorski Kotar.

In addition to going to the fieldwork among the regiment, what is the legacy of Dr. Andrija Štampar, the Hunt for the Silent Killer consists of the authorship of numerous educational texts and brochures intended for the general public. During 2022, together with media partner *Večernji list*, members of the League marked numerous dates significant for The Hunt. For example, these were World Hypertension Day, World Obesity Day, World No Tobacco Day, World Diabetes Day, Salt awareness week, World Heart Day, World Kidney Day etc. Every month materials published in *Večernji list portals* was dedicated to one of the demons of the Silent Killer. The articles were written by more experienced members of the Croatian Hypertension League, but in a way adapted to the general public.

Part of The Hunt is directed not only to the general public, but also to the professional community. Perhaps the most insidious characteristic of The Silent Killer is the belief of health workers that arterial hypertension is a trivial problem that can be easily solved. Under the auspices of the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts, professional books and textbooks are published, which have on the cover the characteristic sign of Hunters- a target by which editions of the Medical Publishing can be recognized. This year, two books intended for the professional public were published, as well as collaborative professions that are invited to participate in The Hunt.

Everyone is called to be the Silent Killer Hunter, because everyone can help expose this treacherous demon with daily engagement. It is on physicians and prominent individuals of the community to act to educate the population, regardless of which profession or health branch they are engaged in. Therefore, dear reader you are also kindly invited to join us in this most important hunt.

Croatian Academy for Sciences and Arts recognized the importance of the problem and acknowledged the public health action Hunt on the Silent Killer being protector of this utmost important project.



Workshop for the mental health



Workshop for pregnant women