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The public health crisis in Greece and its ties to a failing economy

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Economic Crisis

In 2009 the Greek government admitted that the numbers it had been reporting to the European Union about its national budget deficit were artificially small. The deficit was actually huge, way larger than what the EU requires of member countries if they want to reap the benefits of being in this financial network. A benefit of being in the EU is that it makes it much easier for governments to take out large loans, because lenders trust that a member country will make good on its debts due to the security it has from being part of the union. This admission by the Greek government came at the tail end of, and was very much linked to, the global financial crisis felt here in the United States in 2008. As a result, lenders started enacting stricter borrowing rules, and Greece had to take out even more loans. **By spring of 2010 it was veering towards bankruptcy, and in May of 2010 the first of three bailout agreements with the troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, and the European Commission) was reached.** This bailout came with conditions, or austerity terms, that the Greek government had to agree to. These included deep budget cuts, steep tax increases, and promises to implement anti-corruption strategies and cut down on tax evasion.

The second bailout came in 2012 after the recession continued to worsen. The third bailout came in summer of 2015 after a series of failed negotiations between Greece's newly in power Syriza party and the troika, Greece defaulting on its loans, and a popular vote by the Greek people to reject the latest proposed bailout conditions.



Graffiti on building in Patras, Greece, in response to the austerity measures imposed in 2010 and made harsher since. Translated to English: **No pain is enough.**

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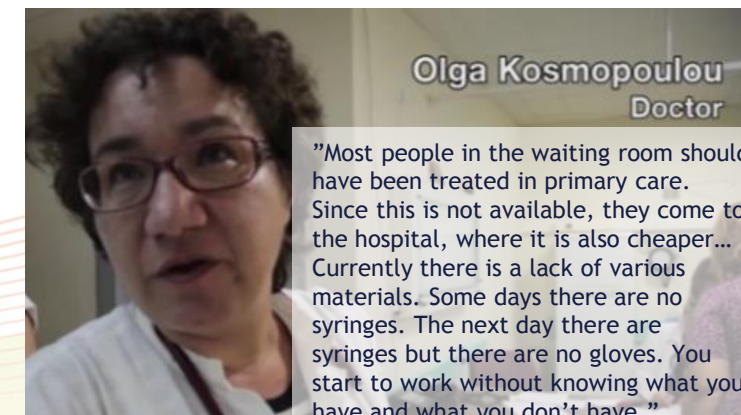
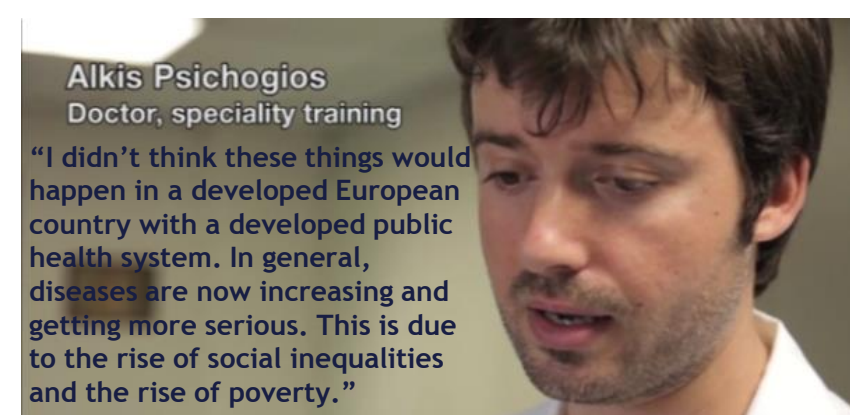
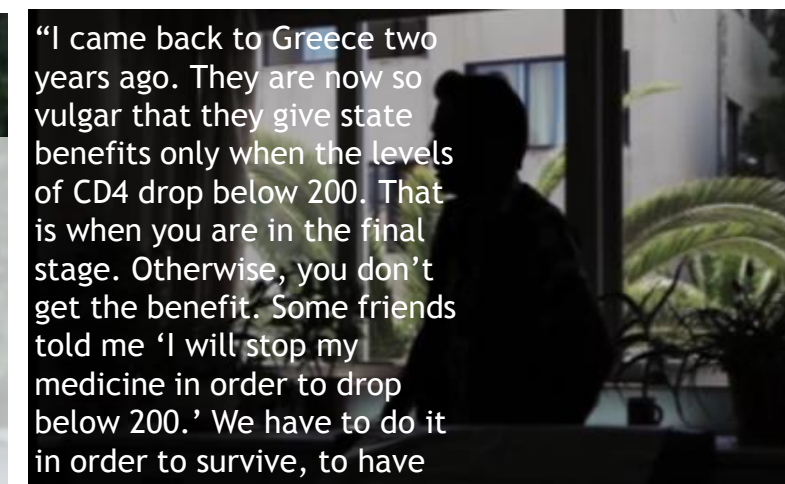
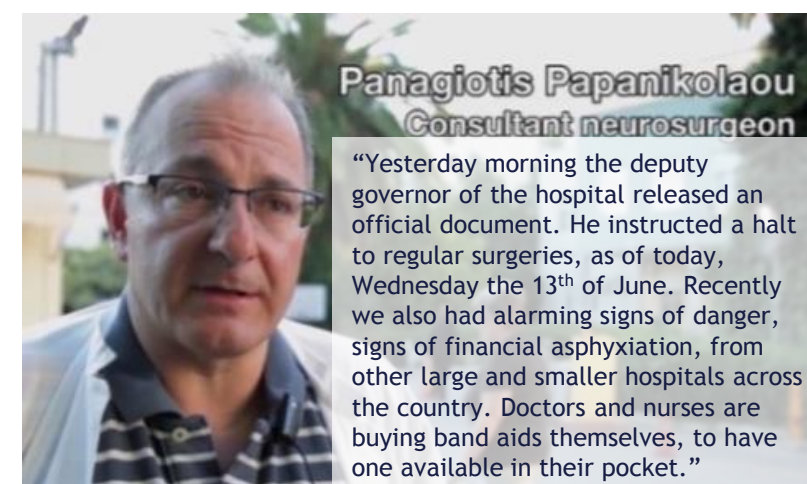
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Healthcare in Greece



Testimonials from clinicians and patients

These quotes come from individuals interviewed by a Greek film maker Aris Chatzistefanou in a short documentary for The Guardian. These people either work for or are patients at Nikaia hospital, located roughly where the purple star is on the map above. All images are taken from the documentary, which is cited in the references. Quotes are written on the image of the person who said them.



Austerity measures affecting healthcare system

Between February 2010 and May 2016, **thirteen** austerity packages have been passed by the Greek government. Several of those which have particularly targeted the healthcare system are listed here:

- Cutting public health insurance for individuals who have been unemployed for over a year
- Reduction in hospital budgets (despite increased public hospital admissions) up to 50%
- Salary freezes and salary cuts for both public and private employees
- Hiring freezes followed by layoffs in the public sector
- Increased health contributions paid by pensioners
- Cuts to the Ministry of Health
- Implementation of drug rationing programs

*see graph below for an illustration of decreased health expenditures

Examples of specific impacts of austerity measures

- Hospitals and doctors offices are without basic medical supplies such as gauze, band-aids, and syringes, and are turning to cheaper equipment in order to cut down costs
- Cancer screening programs have been drastically reduced
- HIV and tuberculosis rates are rising*
- Rates of depression and suicide are increasing
- Malaria is making a comeback due to government's inability to afford the appropriate pesticides
- Public hospitals are being overloaded, partly because people can no longer afford primary care
- Months-long wait time for appointments and procedures
- Drug shortages and increased drug costs
- Some pharmacists and hospitals are asking for cash payments for fear of not being reimbursed promptly by insurance companies
- Patient fees have been instituted at many public clinics and hospitals
- Hospitals are understaffed and clinicians are overworked

*see graph below

Two manifestations of public health changes: cut costs and increased HIV rates

