

SIMPATHY

Stimulating Innovation Management of Polypharmacy and Adherence in The Elderly

Project Summary and Key Outcomes

SIMPATHY was a **European Union co-funded project** designed to address the growing challenge of **inappropriate polypharmacy and medicines adherence in older populations**. The project aimed to support health systems in improving the **safe and effective use of multiple medicines** in people with multimorbidity through the development of tools, evidence and implementation strategies.

The project brought together a multidisciplinary consortium across several European countries to explore how **polypharmacy management programmes can be designed, implemented and scaled** within different health and care systems.

A core component of SIMPATHY was the use of **case studies, benchmarking, literature review and stakeholder engagement**, alongside a **change management approach**, to identify best practice and support large-scale implementation across Europe.

The programme demonstrated that addressing polypharmacy is both a **patient safety priority and a system-level challenge**, requiring coordinated action across clinical practice, policy and health system infrastructure.

Key outcomes included:

- **Recognition of polypharmacy as a major public health and patient safety challenge**, particularly in ageing populations with multimorbidity
- **Development of a systems-based approach to polypharmacy management**, integrating clinical, organisational, economic and policy perspectives
- **Identification and analysis of good practice programmes across Europe**, showing that effective interventions exist but are limited in scale and unevenly distributed
- **Evidence that medication review and multidisciplinary approaches can reduce harm and improve outcomes**, including reductions in hospital admissions and adverse drug events
- **Emphasis on patient-centred care and shared decision making**, supporting improved adherence and better medicines optimisation
- **Creation of a structured change management framework**, including tools (e.g. benchmarking, economic analysis, and Kotter-based approaches) to support implementation at scale
- **Strengthened collaboration across countries and stakeholders**, including clinicians, policymakers and patients, to support knowledge sharing and innovation

Key challenges identified:

- **Increasing complexity of care due to ageing populations and multimorbidity**, leading to higher levels of polypharmacy and associated risks
- **Significant variation across European countries**, including limited availability of structured polypharmacy programmes and lack of consistent guidance
- **Insufficient data, metrics and awareness**, particularly around the economic impact and effectiveness of polypharmacy management
- **Fragmentation across health and care systems**, with barriers to integrated, multidisciplinary approaches
- **Workforce and cultural challenges**, including the need for training, collaboration and changes to professional roles and behaviours
- **Limited evidence base in some areas**, requiring a balance between evidence-based practice and a proactive “bias towards action”
- **Implementation barriers at scale**, including policy alignment, funding, infrastructure and organisational readiness

Overall conclusion

The SIMPATHY project demonstrated that **effective polypharmacy management can improve patient safety, clinical outcomes and health system efficiency**, particularly when delivered through multidisciplinary, patient-centred approaches.

However, achieving this at scale requires **system-wide change**, including stronger leadership, better use of data, cultural and workforce development, and alignment of policy, clinical practice and health system design.

Funder

The SIMPATHY project was funded by the **European Union Health Programme (2014–2020)** under grant agreement **663082**.

Number of Partners

The SIMPATHY consortium included a **multinational partnership of healthcare professionals, researchers, policymakers and organisations** from across Europe, working collaboratively to address polypharmacy management.

Grant Duration

SIMPATHY was delivered during the **EU Health Programme 2014–2020 period**, with outputs published in **2017**, culminating in a comprehensive final report and implementation toolkit.