

Thessaloniki, 11 November 2025

PRESS RELEASE

IC-GROWTH: Research Project Supporting Post-Cancer Treatment – Turning Trauma into Strength

Psychosocial Support after Cancer Treatment and Posttraumatic Growth was the topic of the scientific one-day conference co-organized by the **Psychology Laboratory** of the **Institute of Applied Biosciences (INAB)** / CERTH and the Municipality of Thessaloniki, in the framework of the **IC-GROWTH** research project.

“The experience of cancer does not end with the completion of treatment. For many people, the period after treatment is equally difficult, filled with questions, fears, and changes in identity and everyday life,” emphasized the Deputy Minister of Development responsible for Research and Innovation, **Mr. Stavros Kalafatis**, opening the conference, and added: “Psychosocial support at this stage is not a luxury — it is a necessity. It is our duty, as a state and as a society, to stand by them, to empower them, and to listen to them.”

Referring to the IC-GROWTH project — funded by the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (H.F.R.I.) under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan “Greece 2.0”, with resources from the European Union – NextGenerationEU — Mr. Kalafatis stressed that “it constitutes a model of interdisciplinary collaboration, combining scientific research with practical support and highlighting the power of innovation when it serves the human being.”

The aim of the project is to highlight and strengthen posttraumatic growth in individuals who have experienced cancer, through scientific research, innovative psychosocial care interventions, as well as the participation of patients and experts in open dialogue.

“Such initiatives lie at the core of our strategy to invest in scientific research with substantial and profound social impact. In research that places the Human being at the center. To strengthen actions that improve the quality of everyday life and to promote the human dimension of innovation,” Mr. Kalafatis noted.

“The Institute of Applied Biosciences of CERTH organized this conference with great pleasure, highlighting the importance of collaboration, scientific knowledge, and care for the human being. This initiative lies at the core of our strategy: to invest in scientific research with substantial and profound social impact — in research that places the Human being at the center,” underlined, among others, the Director of INAB/CERTH, **Dr. Anastasia Chatzidimitriou**.

Workshop Highlights

During the event, which took place on Saturday, November 1, at the “Manolis Anagnostakis” Hall of Thessaloniki City Hall, under the overall coordination of **Dr. Christina Karamanidou**, Researcher and Head of the Laboratory, experts and patients shared their experiences regarding care after cancer treatment.

In particular, **Anastasios Boutis**, Director of the 3rd Medical Oncology Department of the Theageneio Anti-Cancer Hospital of Thessaloniki, referred to current medical data and to the patients’ needs after the completion of treatment, emphasizing the importance of continuity and coordination in care.

Eleni Zairi, Pathologist-Oncologist and Clinical Researcher at the European Interbalkan Medical Center, presented the perspective of treating physicians, highlighting both the support needs of patients and the psychological burden experienced by healthcare professionals themselves.

The emotional challenges and the dynamics of empowerment that may develop in patients after treatment were analyzed by **Vasiliki Sifaka**, Professor at the University of Ioannina, who underlined the importance of psychological resilience and rehabilitation programs.

Vasiliki Vakouftsi, President of the Hellenic Patients Association, focused on the crucial role of patient associations in shaping health policy and on the participation of patients themselves as active partners in care-related decisions.

Modern psychotherapeutic interventions contributing to more effective psychological care were presented, on behalf of the Psychology Laboratory of INAB/CERTH, by **Anna Nisyraiou**, Clinical Psychologist and Postdoctoral Researcher, who emphasized the need to adapt interventions to the real needs of patients. At the same time, **Maria Vassilopoulou**, Counseling Psychologist and Research Associate at INAB/CERTH, connected recent scientific trends with the rationale and preliminary findings of the IC-GROWTH program, presenting encouraging data regarding empowerment and growth after treatment.

In the second part of the conference, **Antonis Bozas**, Medical Psychologist and Postdoctoral Researcher, moderated the panel discussion between experts and the audience. During the discussion, the audience had the opportunity to discuss the needs of patients as highlighted through the IC-GROWTH research project, while patients and caregivers shared their personal experiences, adding a deeply human dimension to the conversation.

The participation of caregivers and healthcare professionals further strengthened the dialogue on the need for institutional integration of psychosocial support programs and for synergies among the state, the scientific community, and civil society.

Conclusions of the Conference

The event led to three key points:

- 1. Care does not end with treatment.**
Continuity in psychosocial support and coordinated care services is required.
- 2. Posttraumatic growth can be cultivated.**
Scientifically documented interventions, such as IC-GROWTH, empower patients to transform trauma into strength and personal growth.
- 3. The community of care is a collective responsibility.**
Cooperation among the state, research institutions, professionals, and patient associations is fundamental for care with a human-centered approach.

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