



Boosting Research Careers

The Greek FRESH AIR team during a stakeholder meeting in the Health Region of Crete

Marilena Anastasaki is a researcher at the School of Medicine, University of Crete

How did you become involved with the IPCRG?

I was working at the University of Crete and had the opportunity to conduct my PhD in FRESH AIR, a project in which the IPCRG was playing a leading role. My PhD was on improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of chronic lung diseases in low-resource settings, focusing on the Greek data and context. Apart from transferring knowledge, expertise and practical research tools, the IPCRG offered opportunities to learn about the wider skills needed in research and to connect with other scientists and projects.



Marilena Anastasaki

What made you become involved in respiratory research?

My background is in mathematics and communicable diseases but, when I started my collaboration with the University of Crete, I had the opportunity to work on chronic diseases. My interests were on socio-economic determinants of health, vulnerable populations and community-based healthcare interventions, all of which are equally relevant for both communicable and chronic respiratory diseases. Applying my skills to real life situations was exciting.

How have the opportunities in IPCRG enabled you to grow in the field of research?

IPCRG acted as the glue in the project, helping to bring people together and encouraging us to learn from others. This helped change my working mentality by opening the window to collaboration with researchers from high, medium and low-income countries. I learnt a lot from how other people approach their work, their situations and the collaborative and interdisciplinary work itself, which was less a part of my own culture.

Working with the IPCRG also improved my confidence to do research and stand alongside other researchers at the same level. Working with people from different cultures and learning about their different problems grew my understanding of research priorities and the imperative need for context-driven implementation research. It was a holistic experience that went far beyond what I had seen so far.

What do you think your key achievements have been?

Being able to deliver context driven and highly relevant implementation science is a big achievement. Through our research, we were able to create new data for Greece. We showed that exposure to indoor air pollution is likely underestimated, and is often due to socio-economic circumstances. We also highlighted the important role that family plays towards changing health behaviours in Greece. These insights were integrated in the adaptation and implementation of innovative community-based interventions, such as training for primary care professionals in spirometry and smoking-cessation support and setting-up an evidence-based pulmonary rehabilitation programme for the first time in Greek primary care and rural periphery. I really valued seeing our work offering help to other people and this was echoed in the warm feedback we received from our participants and stakeholders.



Accepting an award for FRESH AIR's pulmonary rehabilitation programme in Crete

What advice do you have for starting researchers?

I would encourage researchers early in their career to think out of the box and to consider other needs, contexts and factors that determine how people behave in different settings. I feel there is a lot to be gained by being open to other approaches and perspectives and to work in an inclusive way. Equally, don't hesitate to take initiatives. Don't let barriers related to your background stop you in your work and don't be afraid of the next steps – there are organisations like the IPCRG to help you!



International FRESH AIR colleagues at IPCRG World Conference in 2018.



Presenting at IPCRG World Conference in 2018

What do you plan to do next?

I plan to apply for a post doc position and further funding. I aim to continue working for vulnerable populations and low-resource settings.