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EUFAMI President's New Year message

It is a great pleasure to send this New Year's message to all our EUFAMI members and supporters. The year just passed saw important new initiatives and we shall be building on these over the coming year along with some further planned developments in 2015. Among the 2014 highlights two call for special mention: a major Family Survey "Caring for Carers" and a strategic review of our possible future over the medium term "EUFAMI Where next?"

The Survey, conducted in collaboration with the research arm of the University of Leuven, is designed to enhance understanding of the needs and challenges facing carers of people with schizophrenia. Field work was completed with an impressive total of over 1200 responses covering 22 countries and initial results from the first seven countries released to coincide with World Mental Health Day on 10 October. The final report, due at the end of March, will provide powerful insights and evidence of the essential role and responsibilities of family carers and hence a new source of support for our member associations when priorities are being determined by policy makers. We shall keep everyone informed of developments.

The need for a thorough review of our strategic perspective after over 20 years existence and in the much changed context of our current work environment was agreed by the Board of Directors and by the Annual General Meeting held in Athens last summer. Subsequently we organised a consultative Members Planning day in Leuven attended by representatives from 17 associations. The results will contribute to the developing strategy for 2015 - 2018 which will be a key feature of our programme this year. Already we can identify main aims as being to expand our membership into central and eastern Europe, to strengthen our links with members, and to deepen our influence wherever relevant policies are considered and decided.

To these ends the most important single event of the year will undoubtedly be the next four yearly EUFAMI Congress – the sixth in the series which began in Stockholm back in 1995 and last took place in Basel in 2011. In keeping with our eastwards looking ambitions the 2015 Congress will be held in the Bulgarian capital Sofia. In similar vein we also plan to continue with our Member Cluster meetings focussed on central Europe. And we shall go on representing member associations and be the strong vigorous voice for family carers across the whole network of international bodies and professional organisations where I believe our reputation is being steadily enhanced.

I do hope that this brief summary our main current activities and plans will enable you to share my own sense of optimism about our future as EUFAMI. On a personal note and on behalf of my Board colleagues and our Secretary-General Kevin Jones I should just like to add that our commitment to all it stands for remains as strong as ever.

With my best wishes for the coming year

Bert Johnson
President
EUFAMI

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