

## **In memoriam Alan Sustic – our friend forever**

The SepsEast community

It was early 2020 during the 1<sup>st</sup> wave of the COVID-19 pandemic when we started our regular (bi-weekly, monthly) Zoom meetings within the SepsEast community in order to help each other by sharing experiences and strategies to attenuate the devastating effects of the pandemic. Alan was representing Rijeka and Croatia, and together with 5 other Eastern European countries (Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, Chechia, Poland) and we again tried to fulfil our long-established vision and mission to help critical care medicine in this part of Europe. The SepsEast initiative started in 2011, and Alan was one of its founders and an important driving force.

When COVID came in 2020, we immediately recognised the severity and decided to start a SepsEast COVID-19 registry. However, regardless of all our will and enthusiasm, the daily duties overtook us, and the lack of doctors and nurses made it impossible to collect high quality data. Alan had been a devoted fighter for better training for both doctors and especially nurses for decades, but our voices failed to reach the top levels of the health authorities, and although we have been ringing alarm bells all over the SepsEast region for almost 10 years, nothing really happened. After eighteen months COVID eventually eased off, and Alan took one of the leads to support the idea that even though we had failed to collect data prospectively, we could try to do it retrospectively. And we did. We showed exactly what Alan had predicted, that mainly due to the lack of nurses and doctors – in addition to some other circumstances of course -, mortality was substantially higher in the ICUs in Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe.

Alan's latest idea was to organize an Erasmus international summer school for medical students in Rijeka in September 2024, which would have been a major achievement, meaning and requiring the collaboration of several universities in the region. The preparations were started, the program outlined, but then something totally unexpected happened that shook us all.

Alan, our dear friend, you are already sadly missed, but rest assured that we will treat your vision as your legacy and will make all efforts to complete your unfinished mission. Your steadfast character, innovative ideas, firm voice, great sense of humour and gentle smile will accompany us all the way, on whatever is left for us in this journey we started together.

May you rest in peace!

Your Friends from SepsEast