

Bodossakis Merkouris<sup>1</sup>

## 2005: Organising and hosting a Wonca Europe regional conference – the Greek experience

Greece is the land where western medicine was born, and hosting a Wonca Europe regional conference in Kos, the homeland of Hippocrates, has been a major challenge for ELEGEIA, the Greek Association of General Practitioners. It was a truly unique experience with many highlights and memories to last a lifetime.

What was innovative in this conference was the active participation of the three major Wonca Europe Working Groups. Each day was assigned to a theme – Education, Research and Quality Assurance – and was organised with the support of EURACT, EGPRN and



**Figure 1**  
Opening of the Conference.



**Figure 2**  
From left to right: Prof. Anastasios Philalithes, Wonca Europe President Prof. Igor Švab and Conference President Dr. Bodossakis Merkouris dancing syrtaki at the Gala Dinner.

<sup>1</sup> President of the Greek Association of General Practitioners ELEGEIA.



**Figure 3**  
Highlight from the Closing Ceremony.



**Figure 4**  
The Hippocratic oath – Hippocrates's entrance.

EQUIP respectively. All the networks' leaders and senior representatives took part as speakers and coordinators in a range of workshops, round tables, meetings and more.

Further, ELEGEIA was the first association to organise a conference built round two teams of young people responsible for performing different tasks. They were:

- The "Cranes", young GPs who were indeed everywhere, assisting seniors whenever needed – from abstract reviewing and forming abstracts into a book, to helping participants find their way in the main conference centre area.
- The "Diamonds", our team of IT specialists.



**Figure 5**  
The Hippocratic Oath – the Chorus.



**Figure 6**  
Awarding of Conference President, Dr. Bodossakis Merkouris, by the Wonca Europe President, Prof. Igor Švab.

The members of these groups worked so closely together that strong friendships were formed that are still flourishing today. A very special and moving moment was during the closing ceremony, when all the individual members of each group – and not just those who customarily work behind the scenes to ensure the event runs smoothly – were called to centre stage and presented to the assembled participants.

The dynamic of the “Cranes” group was such that it continues to function in a variety of ways today in Thessaloniki, and has inspired the creation of similar working groups all over Greece.

No one could claim that it was easy to initiate the organisational work, and there were moments of tension and anxiety when it seemed the preparations would not be completed on time. However, anything is possible when people – especially young people – work together towards a common goal. ELEGEIA was the first association to involve junior GPs and trainees in organising a European conference and in abstract reviewing – an example that Italy and Turkey followed by asking the members of the Vasco da Gama movement to take part in abstract reviewing.

Concerning Vasco da Gama, we are proud that this movement, which was born in Lisbon was actually launched at the Kos conference. It is a movement of enthusiastic junior GPs and GP trainees which enjoyed the support of ELEGEIA from the beginning. They made their presence felt during the Gala Dinner, managing to turn it into a vibrant party with all participants on the dancefloor till the small hours – after all, we were in Greece!

Another unforgettable experience after the closing ceremony was the presentation of the Hippocratic Oath at its original site. To see how it managed to survive and spread all over Europe from a small island was a most moving experience: even the Greek doctors were touched.

Another moment that no one from those who worked for the conference will ever forget was the party the president of the conference (and also ELEGEIA) gave for all of us in his suite. This proved such an enjoyable and relaxing event that the revels continued late into the night: a favourite spot was the pool. Given its success, the president decided to make it an annual feature: we are pleased to relate that every yearly ELEGEIA GP/FM conference is followed by a festive gathering of this kind.

After the conference, there was increased interest on the part of all who contributed to it in the sphere of international affairs. Many were incited to join Wonca Europe working groups and networks, and to attend other international conferences. The conference was highly successful and the hard work contributed by all sowed the seeds of its success. If a message was to be drawn from it, it would be that teamwork and the involvement of young people is essential, and that flexibility is indispensable – there were many last-minute problems to be solved.

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Correspondence:  
Dr. Bodossakis Merkouris  
President of ELEGEIA  
28 Hourmouzi Str.  
GR-54453 Thessaloniki  
Greece  
bmerkouris@gmail.com