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## Internationalisation, globalisation and Family Medicine within Europe



There are two issues that we need to consider when we are faced with the fact that the world today is much more connected than a few decades ago.

On one hand, there is the issue of internationalisation, which is aimed at achieving common standards of care through international cooperation. Internationalisation is often the method by which the key scientific and technological achievements

have been made. Scientists today are working towards shrinking the world by enriching the universal norms and values. International standards and procedures are being developed and approved. The process of internationalisation is the result of shifting scientific paradigms and their roles in changing the established sciences and professions.

Especially in the EU, citizens are easily crossing borders, often without any formalities, and are free to travel to receive health care abroad. It is not uncommon that people spend a few months in one European country and a few months in another, using medical care in two different countries and requiring the same level of expertise from their doctors. As doctors we are increasingly working in multicultural societies which require from us new knowledge about different cultures and their health beliefs. We often meet people whose languages and cultures are difficult for us to understand.

The increased mobility of patients also means that the competencies of doctors within the EU should all reach a comparable level. However, all of the countries do not provide the same level of training for their doctors which is a problem. Family Medicine, especially, is fighting a difficult battle in trying to ensure a high quality of training for future family doctors within Europe.

In 1991, with the European Court of Justice defining health care as a service, a debate on the right balance between different principles in European treaties has started: movement of persons, goods and services, versus the responsibility of member states to organise their health care systems. In this context, patient mobility has become a relevant issue on the EU's agenda. Broad questions

about how to bridge the health gap, how to reduce inequalities in health, how to address specific health problems, and how to find ways of improving the overall performance of health systems, therefore, need to be addressed.

The problem of globalisation is a different one. It is manifested by the effect of rich Western countries on the poor countries. Globalisation refers to new corporate doctrine to dominate the world on a large scale and at the expense of the natural environment, people, their history, culture and traditions. It aims at providing services at a lower cost by maximising profits. The problem exists in Europe as well, since many doctors from less affluent countries tend to work in rich member states, after receiving their training (which is expensive) in their countries of origin.

The role of Wonca Europe is to promote internationalisation of Family Medicine by promoting cooperation among national colleges, by developing its own standards and by cooperating in the production of standards at the European level, in collaboration with other organisations. In collaboration with networks, we have developed the European definition, the Teaching agenda, and the Research agenda for General Practice. We have been invited to collaborate to the development of international guidelines and have often been successful in contributing to international standards, although not always. Even if the pathophysiology may be universal across Europe, the health care systems and the people are not and a consensus (except for a very general one) can sometimes not be reached.

### Conclusion

Internationalisation and globalisation within Europe are issues that we can not avoid. As a professional organisation we are trying to work towards common European professional standards. This is a task requiring a lot of our resources. However, the political dimensions of these standards are equally important. In order to implement the principles in European policies, we have to improve our collaboration with the UEMO and the European Forum for Primary Care. The Basel conference will probably be a cornerstone in this process.