

Rudolf Ludwig Meyer, President of SIMG 1986–1988

From SIMG to Wonca Europe – ESGP/FM

The evolution of international scientific organisations of General Practice in Europe 1959–1995



The SIMG

SIMG (Societas Internationalis Medicinae Generalis) was the International Society of General Practice. It was founded, on the 26th of September 1959 in Vienna, by a small group of diligent and scientifically active general practitioners, such as Dr K. Engelmeier, J. K. Gärtner and others under the leadership of Dr Robert Nikolaus Braun who had published the book

“Die gezielte Diagnostik in der Praxis” in 1957.

SIMG was originally founded as a society for individual members. However later on, corporate membership was introduced to many national colleges and societies, which shared the aims of SIMG.

SIMG was an academic organisation with the aim to raise the international standard of patient care in General Practice, which focussed upon the scientific and medical background to General Practice.

The Evolution of international working groups for specific problems

In addition to the SIMG, some of the pioneers in European General Practice, almost members of SIMG, gathered in Leeuvenhorst (NL) in 1969, and decided to establish informal committees to work further on education and on research.

The Leeuvenhorst Group (EURACT)

Initiated by Professor Gilbert Temmerman (board member of SIMG 1963–1966) the first “European Conference on Teaching General Practice” was held in October 1970 in Brussels (B) and representatives from ten countries were invited. A second conference took place at Leeuvenhorst in 1974 and the working group got their name from that place.

After a crisis, the group was restructured as “The New Leeuvenhorst Group” in 1982 with younger academic teachers in General Practice. Later on the working group was renamed EURACT (European Academy of Teachers in General Practice).



Figure 1
Former Presidents of SIMG. From left: Carsten Vagn-Hansen, DK (1979–1981); René De Smet, Be (1982–1985); Gottfried Heller, A (1970–1979); Lotte T. Newman, UK (1989–1991); Rudolf L. Meyer, CH (1986–1988).

The EGPRW

In October 1971, an informal meeting of representatives from the academies and colleges of General Practice from countries surrounding the North Sea, in which the Royal College of General practitioners played an eminent role, took place at Lemsden (NL). This meeting decided that an attempt should be made to develop some form of European academic co-operation in research. That was the basis for the development of the European General Practice Research Workshop (EGPRW) which, since 1974, meets twice a year. By 1978 bylaws were agreed which stated that the aim of the workshop was: “To encourage research, to foster and co-ordinate multinational studies, to exchange experiences and to develop a validated international scientific base for General Practice.”

EQuIP

The aim of the European Working Party on Quality in Family Practice is to stimulate quality development in General Practice. This is the youngest of the three important European network organisations. It was established in 1991 by Professor Richard Grol in co-operation with Wonca.

The emergence of Wonca region Europe – European Society of General Practice/Family Medicine ESGP/FM

The official inauguration of Wonca (World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Organizations of general practitioners/Family Physicians) was at the congress on General Practice in Melbourne in October 1972. Dr Kent Hughes, the doyen of Family Medicine education in Australia, was elected the first president. In Europe, extensive discussions about a corporation in the future were held between the SIMG board members and the WONCA since 1976.

However, it was only in the early 90s that the aspirations of academic organisations in General Practice, including Wonca, SIMG, EURACT, EGPRW, EQuIP and most national colleges and societies, have converged in a resolution to establish a single European body to promote and represent academic and scientific General Practice/Family Medicine.

To achieve these aspirations a representative working party, known as “The Group of Eight” (4 persons from the SIMG executive and 4 persons from the Wonca European Working Party), had undertaken the preparatory work to convene an inaugural conference for the new society.

This conference was held on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th October 1995 in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The overall theme of this conference was “General Practice in Europe, the state of the art, the shape of the future”. Therefore, the conference in Strasbourg was the meeting place and a historic event for the future of General Practice/Family Medicine in Europe.

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