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The impact of Wonca on Family Medicine and my expectations of the Basel conference



What is my experience and what are my expectations of the Wonca Europe Conference in Basel? In particular, what may be the impact of the conference on teaching, caring and quality tasks, as well as on my own research, at our Institute?

As I am responsible for research at the Institute of General Medicine, University of Lausanne, I am strongly involved in the organization of this conference and thus my

expectations may be too high. Therefore, I will amuse myself and try to answer the question of Primary Care in the same way I would approach a research question.

Firstly, we create the research question

Does the Wonca Europe Conference in Basel contribute to the development, recognition, teaching and research of Family Medicine in Switzerland from a political, economical and academic point of view? Secondly will it lead to attracting more young doctors towards this specialization, in the future?

Then, we look at what is already known

We surely need better political and economical support in Switzerland! The recent political propositions are not very encouraging in reality: reducing tariffs of laboratory work below the limit of profitability and plans for an additional financial participation from the patient in every consultation. Therefore, we do not need important research literature about this question! Additionally, the support of research in Family Medicine is still insufficient: recently we did not receive support from the National Fund for Family Medicine.

The next step in the research design is to establish a good hypothesis

As one of the organizers and a researcher in Family Medicine, I am convinced – though possibly biased by my personal attitude and expectations – that this conference will strongly contribute to the development, recognition, teaching and research of Family Medicine in Switzerland.

Every research question has a null hypothesis

The Wonca Europe Conference in Basel will not help Family Medicine to be developed and recognized and nothing will change – a very depressing expectation!

Take now the alternative hypothesis

Wonca will help development, recognition, teaching and research of Family Medicine in Switzerland. In this sense, it is a very encouraging observation that the politicians and economists start to realize that a strong Family Medicine network is the best basis to assure

health in the population and in the economics of our insurance systems! As everybody is aware, these are often only phrases not related to our daily routine. Certainly, there is still a long way to go but we expect that the politicians will get the message represented by the presence of more than 3500 family doctors from all over the world in Basel.

What are our predictor variables?

Up to now, we strongly profit from an older generation of Swiss GPs and should take advantage of their experience and work force. Furthermore, due to rapid progress in science and technology, notably in analyses, diagnostics and treatments, the population is getting older. Despite this enormous technological progress, we encounter a new dimension of complexity, showing all the limits and possibilities, and leaving no room for simple answers. Furthermore, we should not forget that we deal with patients as individuals, with different beliefs and psyches, and with different economical, social and religious backgrounds. To bring together such complex individual beliefs in the world of specialization we will always need good family physicians.

Confounding variables

Without any doubt, the fascinating world of new technologies and discoveries in medicine has an important economic impact upon our societies, and unfortunately this fact increasingly dominates over the human aspect in the medical treatment of patients, in an unpredictable way!

And finally our outcome variables

Even though a Chair for Family Medicine is still missing and although we still do not receive academic recognition, despite the increasing activities in research, four academic Institutes and one Unity of Family Medicine now exist at the five Universities in Switzerland. The Wonca Europe Conference may strongly contribute to improve this situation and send a positive signal to young doctors to choose our demanding, yet fascinating field of specialization!

In conclusion: I think that the presence of the Wonca Europe Conference in Basel will allow us to reject the null hypothesis! I sincerely hope that the conference will be a strong asset to reward Family Medicine with the recognition and support that it deserves.

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