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Wonca Europe Conference in Switzerland: What are the benefits for Geneva?



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The decision to apply as a host-country for the venue of a European Conference of general practitioners / Family Physicians was a real challenge in a country in which General Practice was a newly arrived sibling among academic disciplines.

In Switzerland, two postgraduate routes of the same duration lead to family practice: internal medicine and General Practice.

For historical reasons the first route has a strong and prestigious academic position, while the latter was, until lately, struggling for a small role in medical education and research.

Over a short time, several factors have acted on both communities to favour a new understanding of the role of family physicians in society and healthcare, regardless of the name of their postgraduate diploma.

Together they will be able to address, more efficiently, the growing need for general physicians to deal with the increasing complexity and fragmentation of medical care.

As part of the steps taken in recent years towards strengthening Family Medicine in Switzerland, every medical faculty has developed structures for General Practice, and most of them have appointed Ordinary Professors.

In Geneva, several developments have additionally acted towards strengthening Family Medicine. The medical faculty has had a reformed (problem-based) curriculum for over a decade, with a strong commitment to community-based teaching. Within this curriculum, family doctors (general internists, general practitioners and paediatricians alike) have enthusiastically taken over teaching and mentoring roles, assisted by faculty members.

Recognising their common political and professional agenda, internists and general practitioners have also joined into one professional society.

In placing Family Medicine within the international context, the Wonca Europe Conference in Basel brings a new impulse to these actions and to future ones. It draws the attention of the academic community towards a discipline that is not only new to Swiss medical faculties, but also a dramatically changing one, due to new and growing social needs on the one hand and the merging process between General Practice and internal medicine on the other.

In the clinical field, the Wonca Conference will surely influence the everyday practice of many family physicians in Geneva, stimulated by new evidence in their field and thus able to improve the quality of healthcare for their patients. It will also strengthen the teaching of General Practice as an academic discipline for students and residents.

On the research level, the Wonca Conference emphasizes the achievements of new projects, and sharing with international colleagues will surely promote new collaborations so as to increase the knowledge of scientifically based practice.

In conclusion, the organisation of the Wonca Europe Conference in Switzerland has been a strong catalyst in both academic and professional milieus in the process of strengthening the new structures and their heads, for the benefit of tomorrow's patients and doctors.

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