

Egle Zebiene, President of EURACT

The EURACT Educational Agenda of General Practice / Family Medicine



The development of General Practice / Family Medicine (GP/FM) during the last decades of the 20th century, with an increasing emphasis on community-based Primary Care, created a need to review the practice, and re-think the philosophy, of the discipline. This resulted in a collaborative project within Wonca Europe and in 2002 it published the new "European Definition of GP/FM" [1]. Once the core

competencies had been clearly defined, educational professionals within the discipline agreed that an entirely new strategy for teaching and learning these competencies should be developed, to achieve desired outcomes during the training process. The European Academy of Teachers in GP/FM (EURACT) took on this task and created an educational framework: "The EURACT Educational Agenda of General Practice / Family Medicine" [2], which was the first practical application of the European Definition, with a focus on the specific area of education. The full text is available at www.euract.org.

Potential impact of the Educational Agenda

The Agenda introduced some key approaches that could have a significant impact on the development of training both internationally and within individual countries.

The central focus is General Practice vocational/specialty training

The Agenda consistently highlights that the essence of the discipline of GP/FM can only be learnt in the General Practice setting, as that is where all the competencies and their features can be demonstrated in their complexity and interrelation. The emphasis of the document is on the Postgraduate training period as, during that time, all the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes can be incorporated and developed into higher level competencies, which should be maintained during a professional career.

From time- and discipline-based, to outcome-based learning

The Agenda was developed at a global, conceptual level and did not define detailed statements on things, such as time and place. The focus on the learning environment and pathology available is changed to a focus on the achievement of specific outcomes – competencies – at the end of training programmes. It presumes flexibility for learning GP/FM in other disciplines, based on clearly defined outcomes to be achieved during each learning period.

Harmonisation in Europe at the level of competency and learning outcomes

Clearly defined learning outcomes, supported by a framework of methods to achieve and evaluate them, offer an opportunity for the international implementation of the Agenda. It is believed that harmonisation of the content and expected learning outcomes of training will have more impact on the desired level of GP performance in European countries, than standardisation of the length of specialty training or curriculum structure.

Further developments

The main purpose of the Agenda is that it should be used to guide the development of postgraduate specialty training programmes, as well as undergraduate GP/FM teaching in University Medical Schools [3, 4]. The framework of the Educational Agenda offers a wide variety of teaching and evaluation methods, which will allow a gradual or staged incorporation of the strategy into existing curricula. The UK has a national, competence-based specialty training programme for General Practice supported by the RCGP Curriculum, which was based on, and has reference to the Educational Agenda [5]. The Agenda, thus transformed into a specific Curriculum, has become a resource for comprehensive and consistent specialty training and it is continuing to be adopted in other member countries of Wonca Europe.

References

- 1 Wonca Europe. The European Definition of General Practice / Family Medicine London: Wonca Europe, 2002.
- 2 Heyrman J (ed.). The EURACT Educational Agenda Leuven: EURACT, 2006.
- 3 Buckle G, Davies M, Knight R, Wells P. A vocational training scheme based mainly in General Practice: does it work? *Education for Primary Care*. 2007;18(5):634-7.
- 4 Soler JK, Carelli F, Lionis C, Yaman H. The wind of change: after the European definition orienting undergraduate medical education towards General Practice / Family Medicine. *Eur J Gen Pract*. 2007;13(4):248-51.
- 5 Being a general practitioner London: RCGP; 2007.

Correspondence:

Egle Zebiene
President of EURACT
Seskinas clinic
Seskinas 24
LT-07156 Vilnius
ezebiene@gmail.com