

Isabel Caixeiro, President of UEMO

# United forces of European family physicians



## More than ever, general practitioners (GPs) / family physicians (FPs) have better reasons to align together

Our intervention on health systems is, *per se*, a demonstration of alliance. Let us consider the patient/doctor relationship: the basic principle that allows doctors to take an active role in promoting health and fighting disease. We also see GPs/

FPs acting as liaison agents among different levels of healthcare, guiding patients and assisting them along other specialties. Finally, let us not forget the strong bond between FPs which holds them together in their mission and reinforces the role they play within multidisciplinary health teams.

Besides these unifying links that are so particular to our activity, other reasons emerge each day that regularly strengthen the cohesion and unity amongst FPs. Health challenges are increasingly complex and demanding, becoming impossible to deal with when using isolated or disarticulated resources. Moreover, FPs have a major responsibility in fulfilling common, current health needs, such as corresponding to patients' expectations, assuring the existence of affordable, safe and quality healthcare and contributing to the sustainability of health systems.

More than ever, it is nowadays fundamental to encourage cohesion and articulation between health systems. Issues, such as emerging threats of pandemics and economical constraints, draw a complex scenario of hard challenges for Family Medicine practice and stress the urgency for a clear global perspective focused on the efficiency of primary healthcare.

To reach such an objective, a certification of excellence, based on proper pre-graduate training and on a specialized post-graduate differentiation, stands out as the essential pillar of General Practice (GP) / Family Medicine (FM) – an activity oriented to the demands and needs of patients and health systems. That is why the evolution of GP/FM is based upon specific medical knowledge and corresponds, similarly to what happens in other areas, to the permanent acquisition of professional competencies and abilities. This path towards excellence has been one of the main concerns of UEMO and the reason why the organisation has been struggling to set up a post-graduate medical specialization that is acknowledged as a qualification standard. At European level, the recognition of the specialty of GP/FM, like any other medical specialty, is now the major objective of UEMO and, we believe, of any other organization representing GPs/FPs.

This goal represents far more than a shallow professional ambition for us; it should instead be interpreted as a step forward for healthcare services that understand the current needs of citizens, in terms of quality, and values the patient as the core element of any health system. Therefore, promotion of the recognition of the GP/FM specialty, on the basis of the Directive 2005/36/CE, constitutes the collective issue for all GPs/FPs.

We also believe that this step will contribute to motivating young doctors to choose the GP/FM specialty, solving chronic workforce shortages in this field.

UEMO, representing GPs/FPs from 25 European countries, has developed a pro-active and committed intervention resulting in major contributions to health policies and institutional relationships. Participation of GPs/FPs in the ongoing debates and reflections, that concern health systems reforms, is seen as an important goal.

Recently, and in order to achieve more visible results of our strategy, UEMO acquired legal status as a European non-profit organisation under Belgian Law. It is our belief that the UEMO will be more able to correspond to the challenges put before us and to develop and reinforce partnerships at a European decision-making level.

This is the sector where the development of joint institutional efforts and regular communication bridges between UEMO and Wonca will result in actual, improved value for family doctors and naturally, for patients. This is the goal targeted by both organisations and our main motivation is to identify areas of closer cooperation and synergy that may translate, in a positive way, to more frequent, desirable gathering of FPs.

Thus, UEMO clearly states its commitment and engagement towards the implementation of regular cooperation with Wonca. UEMO also looks forward to contributing to the success of the Wonca 2009 Conference, which we believe will come naturally as a result of our reinforced relationships and joint work – always under the deep conviction that the permanent evolution of GP/FM also depends on the success of the organisations that represent us and on the unity between all FPs.

The European Union of GPs/FPs – UEMO – represents European GPs and Specialists in FM in Europe.

Created in 1967, our members are the independent and most representative national organisations representing GPs/FPs in many European countries. At present, the following countries are represented at the UEMO: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

The UEMO's core mission is to study and promote the highest standards of training, practice and patient care within the field of GP/FM and to defend the role of GPs/FPs in the healthcare systems. UEMO appeals for the ethical, scientific, professional, social and economic interests of European GPs/FPs and protects their freedom of practice, in the interest of their patients.

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