

Chris van Weel

Integrated Primary Care: what is it all about?

The challenge of health care today is to benefit from the ever increasing technological innovations to promote health with reasonable costs and facilities.

From the disease to the person with the disease

This challenge should be seen against the background of the exponential growth of biomedical knowledge and the ever further specialisation of the medical and paramedical profession. The 'disease' has become the focal point of health care, with 'disease management' its operational focus – diseases, independently from the person with the disease. With this development the social context of illness and disease has taken back stage, despite the fact that social factors by and large determine the health status of people and populations.

Generalism and the role of primary care

Three factors are important to counter this development: community orientation; a generalist approach; and a multidisciplinary medical and paramedical approach. In 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted WHA (World Health Assembly) resolution 62.12 to stress that people should be at the centre of health care, and that health care should be organised from the local community where people live – with accessibility of health care facilities that are relevant for the dominant health problems in that community. This resolution specifies the primary care team to consist of nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and family physicians as the medical generalists.

This resolution has become the focal point of Wonca, the World Organization of Family Doctors that did much in guiding its adoption. The generalist approach is to obtain the maximum health effects, while applying the minimal amount of interventions. This restricts medicalisation and the over-use of health care resources and funds.

It emphasises prevention, and self-efficacy of patients over the application technological facilities. It requires a tight collaboration and networking between medical and paramedical professionals.

Integration: Health (care) in its societal perspective

To be able to respond to populations' needs, it is important to take into account the social determinants of health. This makes it essential to extend the collaboration to non-medical domains of society, in terms of economy, social welfare and social cohesion. This is what the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals aim for: strong, invigorated societies.

This requires a close collaboration between the health care and social welfare sectors. Economic welfare triggers health, but at the same time population health is a determining factor of socio-economic growth. For that reason, the Wonca Council confirmed its commitment to the UN Millennium Development Goals in a resolution adopted at the 2010 Wonca World Council. Family physicians are particularly well positioned to identify the specific health needs of the people and populations they serve, and to direct the most relevant (medical and non-medical) responses to promote health. This, in a nutshell, is the crucial role of primary health care and family medicine in society.

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Assistenzärzte gesucht für Malaga – Erfahrungsaustausch der besonderen Art

Diesen Oktober findet in Malaga, Spanien, der Wonca Europe Congress statt (www.woncaeurope2010.org). Zwei Tage zuvor treffen sich alljährlich die Europäischen jungen und zukünftigen Hausärztinnen und -ärzte (Vasco da Gama Movement, www.vdgm.eu) an der sogenannten Präkonferenz. Dort werden Gruppen mit Gästen aus jedem Land gebildet und über die Hausarztmedizin über jede (System-)Grenze hinweg diskutiert. Jedes Jahr sollen ein bis zwei neue Assistenzärzte aus jedem europäischem Land daran teilnehmen dürfen, um den stets frischen Wind bei den Diskussionen aufrecht zu erhalten (Streit S, Ramser M. Zukünftige Hausärzte nehmen Stellung zur Aus- und Weiterbildung. *Primary Care* 2009;9(2):32–5). Die Fachgesellschaften jedes Landes unterstützen die jungen zukünftigen Kolleginnen und Kollegen. Interessiert? Kennen Sie eine mögliche Kandidatin oder Kandidaten? Dann schnell schreiben, die ersten beiden dürfen gehen.

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