

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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Médecins-assistants recherchés pour Malaga – Un échange d'expériences d'un genre très particulier

Ce mois d'octobre se tient à Malaga, en Espagne, le congrès de la Wonca Europe (www.woncaeurope2010.org). Cet événement est chaque année l'occasion pour les futurs médecins de famille européens (Vasco da Gama Movement, www.vdgm.eu) de se retrouver dans le cadre d'une pré-conférence durant les deux jours qui précèdent l'ouverture du congrès. Celle-ci consiste en des groupes de discussions rassemblant des hôtes de tous les pays et abordant de manière transfrontalière et sans compromis tous les aspects de la médecine de famille. Chaque année, un ou deux nouveaux médecins-assistants provenant de chaque pays d'Europe sont invités à participer, afin de toujours apporter un vent nouveau aux discussions (Streit S, Ramser M. Zukünftige Hausärzte nehmen Stellung zur Aus- und Weiterbildung. Primary Care 2009;9(2):32–5). Les sociétés de spécialités de chaque pays soutiennent cette initiative de leurs futurs collègues. Intéressé/e? Ou connaissez-vous un ou une candidat/e possible? Alors, écrivez-nous dans les plus brefs délais. Les deux premiers annoncés pourront y aller!

Lieu: Malaga, Espagne

Date: Pré-conférence du 5 au 6 octobre, conférence principale du 6 au 9 octobre 2010

Pour participer: info@jhas.ch ou sur le site www.jhas.ch