

François Héritier, President Swiss Society of General Medicine SSMG/SGAM

## Wonca and Switzerland

*Medicine has no national boundaries. William Osler*



Can Wonca really have an influence on the Swiss health care system? This question can be asked at the time of the first Wonca Europe Conference taking place in Switzerland. This impact is probably not so spectacular: most of our health politicians do not even know the name of Wonca and many of our colleagues could not explain the mission of the World Organization of Family Doctors.

The influence is surely more subtle and cannot really be measured but insidiously penetrates every reflection about promoting quality, academic education or research in Family Medicine.

Two examples illustrate Wonca's influence on the current developments in Primary Care in Switzerland: the development of the Academic Institutes for Family Medicine and the work in progress regarding a new title for specialists in general internal medicine.

Encouraging and supporting the development of academic organizations of family physicians was one of the first missions of Wonca, since the beginning in 1972. The Swiss Society of General Medicine has been a member of Wonca since 1992 but the first Swiss Academic Institute for Family Medicine was founded in March 2005 in Basel! What a history before! It is too long to be explained here ... The discussions and resistances are always the same, coming particularly from our own academic colleagues: Family Medicine is not scientific enough, there are no serious publications and no research.

What a fight to get these Institutes! It was almost easier to convince the politicians, especially after our impressive demonstration on the 1st April 2006 with 12000 white coats in front of our Federal Government House in Bern. One of our claims was the academisation of Family Medicine. Since then, we have opened three new Institutes in Zurich, Lausanne and Bern and have celebrated the nomination of three Professors for Family Medicine. Out of five medical schools in Switzerland, only Geneva, the location of the WHO, still struggles for the academic recognition of family doctors but it was recently offered a Primary Care research and education unit (yet still not an independent institute) within the faculty of medicine.

The second example of the implication of Wonca within the Swiss activities in Family Medicine is probably more visible with the explicit use of the European Wonca definition of General Practice / Family Medicine. This document, revised in 2005 with the active participation of Swiss general practitioners, is the basis of our programs for postgraduate and continuous medical education and extends into the Swiss Catalogue of Learning Objectives for Undergraduate Medical Training. The Wonca definition is also an important part of the work in progress for a new title "General internal medicine" that should promote a more flexible and practical postgraduate education in five years time.

We should also mention that the visibility of the Wonca definition has increased with the famous Wonca Tree, created by a Swiss colleague (see page 278).

If I think about the perception of Wonca, I cannot forget the very informative and practice-oriented Journal Alerts that all of us can download for free on [www.globalfamilydoctor.com](http://www.globalfamilydoctor.com). It regularly provides key messages to be implemented on the same day in the medical office.

I could also talk about the active participation of our delegates in all the three wings of Wonca Europe: the network of Teachers in General Practice (EURACT), the association for quality development (EQUIP) and the promoters of research (EGPRN). The inputs from these groups are very supportive in advancing the fields of education, quality and research in Swiss Family Medicine.

Finally of course, I could not conclude without mentioning the expectations that we place in this Wonca Europe Conference 2009, organized for the first time in Switzerland. With the presence and the support of thousands of European colleagues, with models from other countries which have developed the scientific and academic pathways of Family Medicine much further, we want to show that Switzerland can also offer a high and increasing level of contributions in this special discipline of medicine. We want to share our difficulties, experiences and our enthusiasm for Family Medicine, with fellow workers of other cultures from all over the world.

We want to prove to our health policy makers that Family Medicine **is** valuable and efficient in science, in research, in fostering future general practitioners and in caring for people of all ages with any health problem.

We have a place in the core and the heart of each human life.