

Gerhard Schilling, board member of SGAM and member of the working committee "Swiss Family Doctors"

«Hausärzte Schweiz» (Swiss Family Doctors) – Quo vadis?

New structure, new content, new common title for Family Medicine in Switzerland?

The three formerly autonomous Swiss associations of primary health care (general practitioners SGAM, general internists SGIM and paediatricians SGP) have decided to unite for political issues in a corporate, professional association called "Swiss Family Doctors". Therefore, a single and powerful contact can be established for all issues of Family Medicine in terms of "one voice – one structure". The foundation ceremony has been deliberately scheduled for the Wonca Europe Conference.



On the one hand, we, as Swiss family doctors, struggle with the shortage of young doctors like everywhere else, and on the other hand we have to cope with absurd political guidelines increasingly restricting Family Medicine, as well as making it more and more unattractive to medical students. In contrast to other countries, the academic training and research at Swiss universities is totally unsatisfactory and is mainly dominated by specialists.

Although, in Switzerland, we still have the opportunity to examine our patients with the aid of our own in-house medical laboratories, X-ray and ultrasonic equipment.

Since the impressive mass rally on the 1st of April 2006, we now celebrate the Day of Family Medicine every year on the 1st of April and we renew our three main claims, such as better working conditions, better pregraduate education and vocational training and finally a better voice in health care politics. Moreover, the preparations of the launch of a public initiative to embed and strengthen Family Medicine in the Swiss Constitution have reached a very advanced stage. In Switzerland, filing a public initiative is a unique democratic public right.

On behalf of the three primary health care providing associations, a working committee has established a basis for the union of all family doctors in a new corporate association called "Swiss Family Doctors" for a better representation of our legitimate request for the public and for politics. After some intensive preparations and discussions, we are glad that our ambitious project has succeeded

and that the foundation ceremony can take place just during this year's Wonca Conference in Basel.

We are convinced that we, as family doctors, can only stand up to politics and the health insurance companies if we appear with one united voice. The new association will represent family doctors in union, political and media activities, whereas the pure specialist duties remain with the particular associations. In the medium term, we aim for a standardised speciality title in Family Medicine that is accredited, at least, throughout Europe. We are convinced that a substantiated, at least five year, vocational training is indispensable for the demanding job as a family doctor. We very much hope for similar attempts all over the world that result in a common identity with an accredited speciality title in Family Medicine, on the basis of the European Wonca definition. With this in mind we call on all in Wonca united family doctors to work together with us for the same aims.

We, as family doctors providing primary health care, all have the same duties and problems, regardless of whether we are general practitioners, general internists or paediatricians. We are the first contacts for and the confidants of our patients and we help them to proceed along the health care system that is continuously becoming more complex. As the developments improve and the various diagnostic and therapeutic opportunities increase, the more often we, as family doctors, are needed to maintain the overall view and to take care of, guide and advise our patients. This variety holds the fascination for our extraordinary profession. The public is still not aware that we are able to treat almost 90% of medical problems independently in our surgeries, yet at a minimal fraction of the total medical costs. Without family doctors the basic medical care of the population would collapse! It is well worth defending, as well as standing up for, the preservation of this wonderful and fascinating profession. It is our patients' gratitude that we can be certain of!

Translation by Sarah Schilling, many thanks to my daughter!

Correspondence:
Dr. Gerhard Schilling
Chlini Schanz 42
CH-8260 Stein am Rhein
gerhard.schilling@hin.ch