

# REPORT FROM TURKEY

EQuIP Meeting, Noordwijkerhout, 30 May-1 June 2004



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- **Health Reform: Trainers are Prepared for the Vocational Training of the Untrained Practitioners**

The Turkish Ministry of Health had declared to start the family doctor health reform by the end of 2004. One of the main expectations from the reform is to separate personal health care and environmental health activities, which are currently given jointly by the primary care health centers (Sağlık Ocağı).

First phase of the reform has started with the vocational training project of the untrained GP's. The final aim is to subject around 20 thousand practitioners currently active in primary care positions to a two-phase vocational training. The first phase of the training will consist of a 10-day intensive course of basic principles of family practice given in certain centers. This will be followed by a one-year on-site education. Having successfully completed the first phase of the education shall be a prerequisite to make a contract with the system as family doctors. Current practitioners who are not willing to take the course will be designated to managerial positions and environmental health activities.

A core team of educators has been established consisting of mainly family physicians, who will serve as teachers for the rest of the team of educators. The curriculum together with a learners handbook and a guide for educators was prepared which was followed by the core educators course on March 2004. Right after this course, the first course on training the trainers has been performed between 12-20 April 2004. Led by the former president of the Turkish Association of Family Physicians, Professor Süleyman Görpelioğlu, the courses will be distributed throughout Turkey. The next courses are planned in Istanbul, Edirne, Izmir, and Ankara.

Although it is well accepted that the final target will be the gradual substitution of the current practitioners by family physicians, these courses are expected to contribute substantially to the quality of primary care health services in Turkey.

- **Sixth Turkish National Family Practice Congress Performed with Contributions of International GP Leaders**

Organized by the Bursa branch of the Turkish Association of Family Physicians and the Family Practice Department at the Uludağ University, the

sixth family practice congress was performed during 4-7 May 2004 in Bursa. It was a well organized congress with a lot of important contributors from international GP leaders (Prof. Bruce L. SPARKS, WONCA President Elect; Prof. Chris van WEEL, Netherland; Dr. Philip EVANS, UK; Prof. Igor SVAB, Slovenia; Dr. Yonah S.YAPHNE, Israel; Prof. Muharrem ZILDZIC, Bosnia; Assoc. Prof. Christos LIONIS, Greek; Dr. Bodossakis MERKOURIS, Greek; Assoc. Prof. P. Geoffrey HODGETTS, Bosnia; Assoc. Prof. Evelyn M van WEEL- BAUMGARTEN; Dr. Eliezer ALKALAY, Israel; Dr. Saharaf KASIMOV, Ouzbekstan). It was a successful congress with around 500 participants, among them also untrained practitioners, enabling the two parties in primary care to exchange and combine ideas. The main theme of the congress was "Family Practice: the Discipline of the 21<sup>th</sup> Century".

- **A New Step Fitting with TAHUD Policies: The Ministry of Health Announced Over 600 New Family Practice Residency Positions**

According to the health reform plan, around 25 thousand family doctors are needed in Turkey. Although the majority of the positions will be filled by the current practitioners after the vocational course program, the desired solution is to increase the number of family physicians. Concordant with the suggestions of the Family Doctor Consultation Committee, the Ministry of Health made a substantial increase in the family practice residency positions. This is so far the highest number of family practice residency positions released at one time.

Residents in Turkey are selected through a central exam every 6 months. With a stable policy, this rate would end in a primary care system, solely consisting of trained family physicians after 15 to 20 years. However, beyond the quantity of family physicians, also the quality of family practice residency education is currently under debate. With this regard, a lot improvement is expected from the new residency education rules.

- **The New Family Practice Residency Rules are Expected to be Approved by June 2004**

In its current state, family practice residency education in Turkey consists of uninterrupted rotations in five major hospital wards (i.e. internal medicine, gynecology and obstetrics, pediatrics, emergency medicine, and psychiatry). The most important handicaps of the current family practice residency education rules are the lack of any place for primary care practice and the difficulty for the family practice faculty to involve residents in the activities of the family practice department. With the new regulations, it will be possible to include primary care rotations to the residency education. Although the expected rules were accepted in the national parliament in 2003, they could not be applied due to some technical problems. A corrected version of the new rules is expected to be ready in June 2004.

- **Family Practice Preserves its Steady Improvement in the Academic Area: the Number of Family Practice Departments Increased to 34.**

There are currently 50 universities in Turkey with 40 actively teaching medical faculties. With the last designations, the number of family practice departments increased to 34. The department chairs of the new departments are Prof. Rengin Gökmen (Başkent University) and Assoc. Prof. Metin Genç (İnönü University). Six of the departments have family practice centers active in residency education.

Also the number of academicians shows a parallel increase. The recent number of assistant professors, associate professors, and professors in the departments has approached to 30, 9, and 1 respectively.

- **We have Finally an Active FP Board!! Board Executive Committee Members Elected**

The Turkish National Board of Family Practice was established in 1999, but could not be activated until recently. During the national congress in Bursa, a parallel session was arranged for the election of the executive committee candidates. Assoc. Professor İlhami Ünlüoğlu from Osmangazi University Family Practice Department was elected as the president of the Turkish Family Practice Board. The board is expected to have strong influence on the continuous quality improvement of family physicians in Turkey.

- **Turkish-Greek Collaboration: Joint Committee Meetings with ELEGEIA have Started**

The roots of friendship between Greek and Turkish family physicians go back to the development of this specialty in Turkey. Many individual GP's know each other since more than 15 years. There were a lot of previous individual invitations from both associations in the past. Participation of Dr. Bodossakis Merkouris in the first Turkish National Family Practice Days and the third National Family Practice Congress are just some examples. The bonds got stronger as the representatives of each countries as well as many individual GP's met each other during the many congresses at the European level, resulting in good and continual relationships. Presidents of both associations, Dr. Bodossakis Merkouris and Prof. Süleyman Görpelioğlu took the action to lead the Greek and Turkish Associations of Family Physicians to organize a shared meeting. The Greek side organized a three-day meeting with the aim to develop concrete projects for future collaboration.

Twenty-six Turkish family physicians were hosted by the Greek Association of Family Physicians, ELEGEIA at the Hotel Kinissi-Palace in Thessaloniki during 27-29<sup>th</sup> February, 2004.

Some of the topics discussed during the meeting were the ERASMUS/SOCRATES staff and student mobility and collaboration between universities, collaboration between the two associations, collaboration within the European framework, collaboration within the two national journals, disease management in general

practice, and establishing the discipline General Practice/Family Medicine in Greece and Turkey. Many similarities were noted between the two countries with regard to the problems of the discipline, health system, and the academic journals. The fact that the weaknesses of one party could be the strengths of the other, raised the hope to support each other in the necessary areas. One of the concrete proposals during the meeting was the acceptance of publications from one journal to the other, to promote the journal of the other side to the national members, and encourage them to submit papers in English language to both journals; another one, the preparation of shared projects within the European framework. Greek and Turkish family physicians expect to collect the products of this meeting in the near future.

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