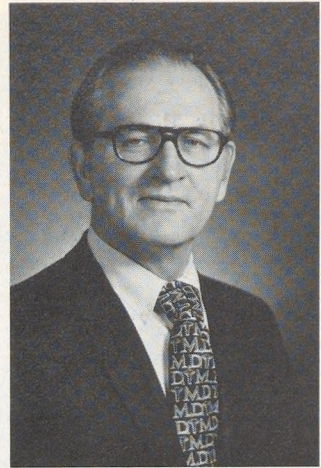


Guest Editorial

Progress and Future Directions of WONCA

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The World Organization of National Colleges, Academies, and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians (WONCA) has now successfully matured into a full-fledged world medical organization.

Founded in 1964, this organization's main objective is to improve the quality of life for the peoples of the world by promoting and maintaining high standards of the general/family medical practice through education and research; to foster communications and understanding among family physicians the world over; to represent the academic and research activities of the family physician before other world organizations or forums concerned with health or medical care; and to stimulate the development of educational and research organizations of family physicians.

WONCA was nothing more than a promise and a hope in 1964. Since then, however, it has brought together a group of world family practice leaders who had the vision and, most of all, the determination to improve the status of family practice around the world.

Today there are 23 member countries represented in WONCA, with applications pending for 12 more nations. All family physicians whose national organizations belong to WONCA are automatically members, making a total WONCA membership of over 70,000 family doctors. While international WONCA conferences every two years have obvious value, the lifeblood of the organization is its 11 standing committees. These com-

mittees are studying emergency care, evaluation and examination, medical records, psychological medicine, research into the international classification of disease, general family practice research, the training of teachers, bibliography, standards of accreditation, and continuing medical educational and vocational training. Already they have been productive — the Committee on Research into the International Classification of Disease, for example, produced a codebook which now makes international research in family medicine feasible. Thanks to this committee, family doctors now speak a common medical language.

Looking ahead, the future of WONCA seems to lie in a number of directions. The bi-annual meetings of family physicians from all over the world have proven political value in making the governments aware that standards in family practice should be going up. But do an urban American doctor and a Malaysian physician practicing in a rain forest area have anything to learn from one another? Is goodwill the only reward for the WONCA conference delegate? Some members feel that the answer lies in more regional conferences, where physicians practicing in similar climates and geographical settings can rub shoulders and compare medical expertise. WONCA has divided the world into five geographical regions for this purpose.

The gains to be made by the mingling of family medicine organizations, apart from individual physicians, are quite apparent. Former WONCA presi-

dent, Dr. M. O. Kent-Hughes of Australia has said that "each country needs the help of the other; each college must be ready to pass on the fruits of its labor." World medicine is one area in which trade secrets or patents have no place. In the last few years family practice organizations have sprung up in Norway, Malaysia, and Singapore. While this has been due to the efforts of family physicians in those countries, their participation in WONCA and their realization of the progress in family medicine made in countries in which national organizations exist has been a definite inspiration.

It has become my great honor to be President-Elect of WONCA and to assume the Presidency in 1978 in Montreux, Switzerland. I accepted this responsibility because of my deep sense of conviction that together with The American Academy of Family Physicians we can make a significant contribution to the advancement of the similar purposes of the AAFP and WONCA. Toward this end a joint meeting of these two organizations is being planned in New Orleans in 1980. Because I believe that these two organizations are complimentary to each other I will make every effort to acquaint family physicians of this country with the objectives, purposes, and opportunities that are provided by WONCA. Through increased participation we should have a greater opportunity to share our knowledge and to learn from others so that the quality of family practice around the world can be enhanced.