

WONCA 1986: 'Towards 2000'

THE World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians (WONCA) sponsors the International Conference of Family Medicine which takes place every three years. The Royal College of General Practitioners is the host college for the 1986 conference which will be held from 1–6 June at the Barbican Centre in London. Judging from the attendance at the last two international conferences of WONCA in New Orleans and Singapore, the Barbican Centre will be thronged with general practitioners from all over the world. However, the importance of the conference does not rest simply on the size of the gathering.

In selecting 'Towards 2000' as the theme for the conference WONCA is encouraging general practitioners to face the challenge posed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The 30th World Health Assembly in 1977 resolved that 'the main social targets of governments and WHO in the coming decades should be the attainment by all citizens of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life'. The importance of the subsequent Declaration of Alma-Ata¹ was that primary health care was seen to be the key to achieving health for all.

WONCA 1986 comes at a highly significant time in the development of general practice throughout the world. We are nearly half-way between the Declaration of Alma-Ata and the year 2000 but we are not remotely half-way towards achieving health for all. It is not only in the United Kingdom that the effectiveness of general practice is being questioned. General practitioners cannot assume that they will always be a central or even a major provider of primary health care in the future. In the developed countries of the world patients are turning to alternative medicine on the one hand, and towards direct access to specialists on the other hand. In the developing countries general practitioners may be confined to urban areas and available only to the more affluent members of the community. Dr Hannu Vuori in his keynote address to the conference will look at the way in which general practitioners can block or facilitate the development of effective primary health care.

An international meeting of the size of WONCA 1986 has enough events, lectures, demonstrations and activities to satisfy

all tastes and interests. The main sessions will consider maternal and child health, health education, community participation and nutrition. This last session provides the most vivid example of the gross inequalities in health which exist in the world. The contrast between the famine in Africa and food over-production in the developed countries is a stark reminder of the need to encourage a world view of human problems.

General practitioners tend by the nature of their work to be interested in the individual and his immediate locality. While this has the advantage of enabling health care to be appropriate to local needs, it has the disadvantage of causing some doctors to become parochial in their outlook. Unlike the members of some other professions, general practitioners have little opportunity to sample the delights of international conferences. WONCA 1986 will be a unique opportunity for general practitioners in the UK. Great interest from overseas doctors is already apparent. More than 300 papers have been submitted to the Organizing Committee for consideration for the sessions allocated to free-standing papers. There will also be poster sessions in which short papers are displayed and the authors are available for discussion. The social programme includes dinner at the Guildhall and a reception by Her Majesty's Government.

WONCA 1986 gives general practitioners the chance to look beyond the usual regional and national horizons at innovations and experiences in other countries. One of the benefits of an international gathering of this kind is the contact between professionals working in very different circumstances and different parts of the globe, who nevertheless, discover shared enthusiasms and ideals.

The conference has been approved under Section 63 (zero rating) for doctors in England and Wales. Doctors in Scotland should write individually to the Scottish Home and Health Department for approval if they wish to seek help with travel and accommodation costs. For further details write to: The Conference Secretary, Conference Associates, WONCA, 34 Stanford Road, London W8 5PZ. Tel: 01-937 3163.

Reference

1. World Health Organization. *Alma-Ata primary health care. Report of the International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata, USSR, 6-12 November 1978*. Geneva: WHO, 1978. (Health for all series no. 1.)

Trends in general practice computing

COMPUTERS are coming, and they are coming into general practice — quite slowly in some places but swiftly in others. Somehow computers in practice have suddenly moved from being out of the way to being commonplace and are emerging as instruments of change for the future.

It is now 15 years since the publication, in a relatively obscure international journal of biocomputing, of the first report from a general practitioner going on-line with a computerized medical record in day-to-day general practice.¹ In this way J.F. Preece put Britain ahead of the field and it is probably still true that computerized developments in relation to general practice are attracting as much attention and energy in Britain today as in any other country in the world.

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Since that early report the main technical change has been the move from using mainframe computers to using micro-computers placed in the practices themselves. The steadily improving technical performance and the growing memory capability which has become available for a given sum of money has increased the power and reliability of these machines. It is not surprising that the College's 1985 *Policy statement 2, Quality in general practice*,² should see computers as essential and be looking towards ways of ensuring that they are more easily available to general practice.

The College has already published *Occasional paper 13*³ in 1980, which set out the specification for computers in general practice, and subsequently *Occasional paper 26*⁴ went further in providing a classification of disease in general practice suitable for computerization. The College's first book on computers by