

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

Malcolm and Poyser⁵ was published by Pergamon in 1982 and stemmed from an important study day held at 14 Princes Gate. Now, in 1985, the College is publishing *Trends in general practice computing*, a book conceived within the Publications Committee and edited by Michael Sheldon, until recently Senior Lecturer in General Practice at the University of Nottingham, and Norman Stoddart, the College's ICI Computer Fellow.

In their Preface the editors explain that the book is not intended primarily as a manual, nor even as a definitive statement, but as 'a collection of essays written by general practitioners with practical experience of using computers in their practices'. It covers such basic topics as the age-sex register and repeat prescribing, which are currently two of the commonest uses of computers in general practice, but it also includes a number of chapters giving important pointers to more exciting developments now in operation.

It is clear from this book that computerization will bring important advances in clinical systems, in office systems and in the transmission of information. As far as clinical systems are concerned, computers are ideal for handling the kind of information necessary to provide systematic preventive care and to integrate information which may lead to exciting developments in general practice prescribing. As far as office systems are concerned, word processing is already becoming common and the computer opens up possibilities for the electronic office of the future which are at present merely dreams. As for the transmission of information, networking (or the direct transfer of information from one computer to another) opens up new vistas of communication not only with family practitioner committees but between various professional and health service bodies. Such exchanges of information should undoubtedly be beneficial to both practices and patients.

Trends in general practice computing is not likely to remain a standard work for very long. The field is changing all the time and what is new one day becomes obsolete the next. Nevertheless this book provides a useful overview of the issues which are currently attracting attention, gives detailed information about a number of the commoner applications of computers and provides a useful introduction to those practitioners whose practices have not yet taken the plunge into computing. It is a book that is both theoretical and practical. It is written by general practitioners for general practitioners and could well mark the first of a series of such publications, given the pace of technical innovation today.

Trends in general practice computing is published by the Royal College of General Practitioners and is available from the Publications Sales Office, 8 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JE, price £12.50, including postage. Payment should be made with order.

References

1. Preece JF, Gillings DB, Lippman EO, Pearson NG. An on-line record maintenance and retrieval system in general practice. *Int J Biomed Comput* 1970; 1: 329-337.
2. Royal College of General Practitioners. *Quality in general practice. Policy statement 2*. London: RCGP, 1985.
3. Royal College of General Practitioners. *Computers in primary care. Occasional paper 13*. London: RCGP, 1980.
4. Royal College of General Practitioners. *Classification of diseases, problems and procedures 1984. Occasional paper 26*. London: RCGP, 1984.
5. Malcolm A, Poyser J (eds). *Computers and the general practitioner*. Oxford: Royal College of General Practitioners/Pergamon Press, 1982.

Management Appreciation Programme

FOR

General Practitioners and Practice Managers

As part of a developing service on management, the Royal College of General Practitioners is pleased to offer a series of two-day MANAGEMENT APPRECIATION COURSES for general practitioners and their senior practice staff. These events will be held at 14/15 Princes Gate, where overnight accommodation is available if required.

The Course leader is Mrs June Huntington, Fellow in Organizational and Professional Studies at the Kings Fund College. The programme director is Mrs Sally Fountain, General Administrator of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

The Course aims are:

- To alert course members to changes in the nature of general practice as an organization and the corresponding need for more effective management.
- To clarify the management task and its relationship to better patient care.
- To explore in depth four specific areas of management in general practice — the management of self, others, the organization and meetings.
- To enhance the competence and confidence of course members in these aspects of practice management.

The course fee inclusive of residential accommodation is £120 for members and their staff; excluding residential accommodation, the fee is £100. For non-members, the course fee is £140 inclusive of residential accommodation and £120 exclusive. The fee includes all meals, refreshments and extensive course notes.

The College is currently seeking approval for the course under Section 63 for zero-rating; under paragraph 52-9 (b) of the Statement of Fees and Allowances, the costs of practice staff attending the course will be eligible for 70% reimbursement.

The dates for forthcoming courses are as follows:

31 January–1 February 1986	course number MA1
18–19 April 1986	course number MA2
16–17 May 1986	course number MA3
18–19 July 1986	course number MA4

Application forms and further details are available from: The Information Service, The Royal College of General Practitioners, 14 Princes Gate, Hyde Park, London SW7 1PU. Tel: 01-581 3232.