

WONCA Europe

I was fortunate enough to be asked to attend WONCA 2006 in Florence in my capacity as one of the GP registrar observers on council.

The opening ceremony on Sunday evening lasted almost as long as the conference! The event started with speeches from everyone linked to the conference and their relatives, and ended with a curious dance troupe performing a number of unique pieces. In between Dr Sam Everington was awarded with the WONCA 5-star award and gave an excellent overview of life in East London.

The conference proper had some excellent parallel sessions (particularly good education-related workshops from EURACT) and very long breaks — needed for the incredible length of time it took to get an incredibly small cup of espresso. Evenings involved rare beef and good red wine at drinks receptions or the chairman's dinner.

This was my first WONCA experience and it was a good experience. There are a lot of people in Europe passionate about good quality general practice, particularly the young GPs and trainees in VdGM. General practice has a strong future.

Eric Kelly

.....

Florence was the ideal location for a conference aiming to 'bridge the gap between biology and the humanities'. The city and its art encourage reflection, and we were reminded here that at the time of the Renaissance the art/science dichotomy didn't exist — artists, philosophers and 'scientists' trod a common path to try to increase their understanding of what it means to be human.

The best presentations here were the ones that challenged expectations, altered perspective and made us reflect on what we do. For instance, I can cry at

the movies as well as the next man, but dabbing my eyes while watching a clip from *The Lion King* was, erm, unexpected. The Brazilian Gonzalez Blasco led us here during an inspiring presentation on the use of film to teach family medicine. I've seen the film before many times with my children, but it, and Elton's saccharine soundtrack, has always just wafted over me like a dull draft. With protected time, an educational context and a charismatic facilitator surprising things can happen.

Perhaps a more enduring cultural discovery will be that of the painter Willem de Kooning, introduced by a Dutch group in a session on chronic somatisation disorder. At first sight his art, like these patients, is just a big colourful mess but with 'active looking' and thought recognisable patterns emerge.

Later, 'reflecting' over a cold beer in the magnificent Piazza della Signoria, I watched the crowds milling around David, Michelangelo's enduring symbol of human perfection. Despite the humility temporarily afforded him by a pigeon defecating on his head, he stands self-confident and determined. By contrast the chaos of life underneath seems vulnerable and ephemeral.

I've learnt a lot here, I'm just not sure what it is. But when I get back to work, I feel it's going to help.

Simon Curtis

.....

Proud! Proud of my profession, proud to be a GP trainee, proud to be one of the GP trainees who could attend both the VdGM preconference and the WONCA main conference!

In April 2005, the LOVAH, the Dutch National Association for GP trainees, founded a Taskforce European Affairs (www.lovah.nl/wes.htm). I was one of the founders. It dedicates itself to the

exchange and integration of the various areas of general practice in Europe. This is mainly done by participation in international conferences and different kinds of exchange programmes. This year our employer made it possible to visit the congress with 48 Dutch GP trainees.

Sunday morning I woke up in one of the most beautiful cities of Europe, Florence. Where Lorenzo de Medici empowered the renaissance. Where Vesalius did the first anatomy. Where not the contemplation on the history of their profession, but their own observation and experiments were the key to knowledge. When I entered the Fortezza I met 40 new European colleagues. When I left 4 days later, I had 40 new friends.

We discussed the differences between the European countries, we tried to find solutions to the problems we all encounter, but the thing that impressed me the most was that we all want a good education and primary healthcare system, to be able to offer best possible care to our patients. I think we could be a role-model for politicians. Willing to listen to each other, not stuck to our ideas, able to see our blind spots, but above all working together to improve primary health care. One of the key messages I took home: 'Think globally, act locally'.

Chantal Emaus

.....

The decision to send a delegation to WONCA is visionary.

This presents a newly qualified GP with the most amazing appreciation of how our international colleagues work, the challenges and opportunities that they face, and to learn of their respective healthcare systems and training schemes. I was left with the unmistakable impression that the RCGP and British GP training is way ahead of the game, how high the bar that our trainees must reach,