



Rachel pictured with her godson.

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Oompa Loompa Doompadah Dee ...

'You were where?' comes the incredulous response. 'WONCA', I repeat, doing my best to look professional. But I don't blame them. When I first googled 'international conference for family medicine' looking for inspiration at the start of my GP training I wasn't at all convinced I had found what I was looking for. WONCA just doesn't sound plausible. It took three conferences to work out that it stands for the World Organization of National Colleges and Academies of General Practitioners. By then I had discovered the social agenda of the conference — to charm a junior Dutch GP into giving you one of their exclusive 'golden tickets' to their free party — and it was too late to stop thinking Chocolate Factory.

Having navigated my way through Lisbon 2014, Istanbul 2015, and Copenhagen 2016, I have decided that getting the most out of WONCA conferences is an art form that needs to be honed. First step: Embrace your inner Terry Wogan. Yes, it is like Eurovision for GPs. Second: Find an outlet for your inner Terry Wogan by joining the UK Whatsapp group and bonding with your own culture's sense of humour (or in our case, cynicism). It's a great opportunity to meet other trainees and get invited to the UK embassy to chat to the big names in the RCGP who are all pretty lovely over canapés and wine (who isn't?). Third step: Put your Terry Wogan to one side and immerse yourself. Talk to family doctors from all over the world, of all ages and experience. In Copenhagen there were 72 countries represented. I met a Danish GP who performed appendicectomies in Greenland, Dutch doctors who routinely euthanise two patients a year, and a young GP from Jerusalem who was puzzling over what to do about her rabbi patient who had dementia and was sleeping with a gun under his pillow.

Make the most out of WONCA by checking the programme the night before and deciding what to attend; there is too much choice to wing it. Keynote speeches tend to be good but there will be some disasters. The new conference app really helped my Hit:Miss ratio. If you are a trainee go a day or two early and attend the 'Vasco da Gama' pre-conference organised by

trainees from the host country. Finally, enjoy discovering the host country. One of my favourite moments this year was when I mistakenly followed a sign for a toilet with baby-changing facilities and found myself in the men's toilets! (Danish men change nappies.)

Highlights from the last 3 years include Margaret McCartney speaking in Lisbon, a real-time Balint group centred on the over-protective family of a Russian refugee, and an Austrian tutorial on how to draw family circles to help visually understand patients' social contexts. Last year, a workshop entitled 'What really goes on in the bedroom?' was brilliantly run by three trainees from Estonia on how to talk about sex to your patients. Given the current crisis in keeping young family doctors in Estonia it was heartening to see how well they structured the session, coped with huge numbers of us (pathetically!) attracted by the title, and kept people of diverse nationalities engaged. Sessions such as 'The world café on what keeps family doctors happy at their work' facilitate the sharing of our own ideas each year, while artistic performances emphasised the holistic nature of general practice. Lisbon's opening ceremony was presented by a Portuguese medical graduate, who, now a world-class conductor, used her symphony orchestra to show how a family doctor coordinates the different specialties for the benefit of the patient. And this year, the presidents of Scandinavian primary care organisations gave a remarkable jazz band performance — hard to imagine that happening at any other medical conference!

Although the quality can vary, I have come out of each conference more inspired and proud of the strengths in our specialty. After all, the flexibility, pragmatism, collaboration, and enjoyment of people that are all required to enjoy the conference are also key to thriving in general practice. As long as you take care not to over-indulge, WONCA can be a real treat.

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