

The strategy for future Wonca Europe conferences

In their 2004 meeting in Amsterdam the Wonca Europe council discussed the report of the "Working party on future conferences" and expressed the need to set forth a number of guidelines and recommendations in order to raise the level of future Wonca conferences. The council asked the executive board to develop a strategy and play a leading role in the preparation of future conferences. This paper describes such a strategy.

The aim is to make future conferences more attractive to general practitioners/family physicians, both to contribute and to participate. This implicates the need to raise the level of scientific presentations and to show how scientific evidence can be applied in everyday practice. Therefore, it should be considered to improve the structure of future conferences in order to address better the needs of different target groups. Several strategic considerations may help to achieve the tasks mentioned above.

Target groups.

The first step in preparing these strategic guidelines would be to give a clear definition of the specific target groups to be addressed in the conferences. Those groups comprise:

- practising GPs interested in improving practical skills and updating clinical knowledge
- researchers in General Practice/Family medicine
- GP trainers and teachers
- trainees and young doctors

Each of these groups has their specific interests and goals when attending conferences, although a wider circle of interests is often present. For this reason it is important to form separate paths of high-quality activities specifically oriented to the needs of each group. These tracks on specific themes should be clearly visible in the conference programme.

Structure of the conference.

The programme of Wonca conferences was formerly based mainly upon selection and arrangement of the submitted abstracts. To raise the level of future conferences it is strongly recommended that a part of the conference will be more actively planned by the Host Organiser. This can be done by inviting experts or expert organisations to contribute toward specific themes, such as state-of-the-art sessions, debate sessions or consensus panels. A proper balance should be maintained between sessions arranged by the Host Organizer with Wonca Europe and sessions where participants present their research findings, or give workshops dedicated to specific themes.

Role of the Networks and other expert groups.

The Wonca Europe Networks, or certain experts from these networks, might be asked to contribute to the actively programmed part of the conference. Besides that the Networks should be given the opportunity to organise sessions or mini-symposia on specific themes within the setting of the conference.

In addition, other expert groups should be encouraged to participate in future Wonca conferences. It is important that they consider Wonca Europe's conference to be an important platform for them to meet, exchange ideas and share their new insights with the practicing GP's attending the conference. This can be done by inviting them to hold state-of-the-art sessions, involving them in certain tracks within the programme, and by offering them an opportunity to have meetings or satellite symposia outside the programme.

Programme of the conference

The overall programme of the conference should be divided into three main parts:

1. An actively planned part of the programme consisting of keynote lectures, state-of-the-art sessions and planned tracks dealing with certain themes.
2. A part of the programme, based on the submitted abstracts, consisting of presentations of research findings, posters, workshops, symposia, etc.

3. Satellite symposia and meetings, outside the programme, but within the context of the conference, for other organisations like Trade Unions, special interest groups, or other specialist organizations with interests in primary care. These activities should be oriented to GPs and relevant to the general practice discipline.

Preparation of the conference

An important step in the preparation of future conferences would be to distribute information about the conference themes in advance and ask potential participants to send their ideas and requests for important topics that might be included in the conference agenda.

After defining the basic interests of each target group, the local organiser and Wonca Europe can discuss possible actions and define how the Networks and other expert-groups can contribute to the conference.

Programme suggestions regarding the different target groups.

1. Practicing GPs

The main activities for this group of conference participants should be oriented toward the improvement of practical skills and updating of clinical knowledge and its application to everyday clinical practice.

According to the selected topic, methods used for achieving these goals could include:

- Keynote presentations
- State-of-the-art sessions
- Round-table discussions
- Practical skills training sessions
- Workshops
- Three network sessions
- Case analysis sessions
- Debate sessions on controversial themes
- Hot news sessions

It is important that conference organizers ensure that evaluation of activities is arranged both by participants and expert groups, in order to collect useful information for future conferences.

2. Researchers in General Practice and Primary care

The need for high-quality research in General Practice has repeatedly been under discussion during the last few years. To address this problem and improve research quality, activities oriented to the needs of researchers with different levels of expertise should be ensured during the conference. The main activities to be organised for this group could include:

- Keynote presentations by medical journal editors, presenting and analysing the most successful research projects published during the year. Project leaders might be invited as well to discuss their position on this.
- Round-table discussions on research topics and possibilities, as well as practical issues. This activity might be also used to stimulate research in specific areas with a strong need for research, which are not investigated enough.
- Discussions on preparation of scientific findings for publication;
- Feedback sessions on research projects.
- Moderated poster sessions, led by experts.
- Conference awards, such as "best poster award" or "young investigator award".

3. Educators and trainees

The main topics of this group of activities may be oriented to trainers and trainees separately, as well as joint sessions to clarify different points of view on the topic. It is also important to agree that due to extremely different levels of training, the highest importance should be given to topics of international European interest, rather than presenting each country's problems in education.

The main activities to be organised for this group could include:

- Presentations of successful implementation of innovative teaching methods in medical education
- "State-of-the-art" sessions
- Workshops

- Round-table discussions on application and use of teaching methods
- Presentation of innovative curricula in General Practice teaching
- Educational research findings, overviews, analysis, etc.
- Practical teaching skills training workshops

Since the young doctors organised themselves within the Vasco da Gama Movement (2005), the annual Wonca Europe Conference is an important moment for them to meet, exchange ideas and discuss their specific issues. Therefore it is important that the Host Organiser offers VdG room within and outside the Conference for their specific activities. Wonca Europe will also develop a policy to support VdG in a broader way.

Collaboration between Wonca Europe and the Host Organiser

The Host Organiser is primarily responsible for the organisation of the conference. Agreements between the local organiser and Wonca Europe are settled in the contract. Wonca Europe gives support to the local organiser by offering a complete and detailed "Guidebook on future Conferences" with timetables on all aspects of organising a Wonca conference. This guidebook includes a precise description of the different type of sessions to be considered.

Furthermore, the three Networks of Wonca Europe, Euract, Equip and EGPRN offer their contribution to the programme, more specifically to the actively planned part of the conference. Wonca Europe will also put the Host organiser in touch with representatives of the Wonca Europe expert groups who may contribute to the conference.

Finally, Wonca Europe will make an effort to build up a fund for scholarships out of the resources from sponsoring satellite symposia.

On behalf of Wonca Europe a liaison officer from the Executive Board will have periodic contact with the local organiser. The progress of the preparations will be discussed on the basis of the timetables in the guidebook.

After the conference a report on the evaluation of the conference activities should be presented by the Host Organiser and discussed with Wonca Europe in order to provide ideas and suggestions for further European Conferences. As a result, there will be an update of the "Guidebook on future conferences".

Organisational and financial aspects.

It is important that the conference is organised in an appropriate venue with adequate facilities and technical equipment to guarantee the proper and unimpaired proceedings of all aspects of the conference. The venue needs to be easily accessible for reasonable costs. It should also have enough hotel accommodations with reasonable prices, including low budget accommodations.

The Host Organiser will take care for an acceptable conference fee, including graded fees for trainees and graded fees or scholarships for colleagues from developing countries.

Sponsoring by the pharmaceutical Industry is allowed, as long as there is no influence of sponsors on the content of the Conference and the sponsoring is in accordance with the European rules. Wonca will give support to the Host Organiser in looking for sponsorship.

In a year of a World Conference the conference date should be at least 4, preferable 6 months before or after the Wonca World Conference.

Documents related to this Wonca Europe conference strategy.

1. Document annexed to the bidding procedure.
2. Contract between Wonca Europe and the organising member organisation.
3. Protocol for the official ceremonies of Wonca Europe Conferences.
4. Guidebook for future conferences.
5. Protocol for the liaison person.
6. List of Wonca's network organisations, Wonca's special interest groups and other Primary Care expert groups.

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