

# The Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> EURIPA European Rural Health Forum, held in Palma Majorca 2010

The first EURIPA European Rural Health Forum, held in Palma Majorca 2010 has directed the EURIPA Executive to develop a strategy document, which aims to identify a future direction for Rural Health and Rural Family Practice in Europe. The 4 main strategy areas include Research, Education, Quality and Policy development.

A number of recommendations are generic and include

- To remain committed to EURIPA's mission statement
  - ***"To ensure that all the rural and isolated populations in Europe have access to high quality health care irrespective of location, culture or resource"***
- Utilise experience and knowledge from other parts of the world in the field of rural health and rural practice
- Despite the differences between rural areas throughout Europe it appears that the issues are largely generic
- The need to establish an evidence base to underpin policy recommendations
- The development of working networks with other professionals, professional bodies and organisations with similar goals and aspirations
- Multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral working and collaboration
- Understand the importance of positive value added interventions in improving recruitment and retention
- The use of appropriate technology based on need rather than need to use it
- The importance of thinking outside the box and not being afraid to do things differently
- Develop engagement at the highest levels, whether locally, nationally or internationally ensuring that policy makers understand the issues.
- To improve the status of rural health/rural practice by:
  - Establishment of an academic infrastructure
  - Engagement with academic bodies, professional organisations, government, voluntary bodies etc..
  - Involvement in conferences, educational events etc...
  - Expansion and marketing of the EURIPA network
- Many rural doctors are nearing retirement age. It is important that young doctors are encouraged to enter rural practice. Vasco de Gama is an important organisation to engage with

EURIPA believes that research is an essential element of rural practice and undertaking research fills important gaps in knowledge, improves the status of rural health and informs future rural health policy. A research strategy should include and highlight:

- The importance of research as an integral component of rural practice
- In view of the general lack of experience and sophistication in research in rural areas, an easy to use research toolkit should be developed and made

available together with educational interventions aimed at rural health professionals

- The need to identify the cross-disciplinary and cross sectoral body of knowledge in Europe concerning rural health and rural practice.
- Identify possible partners and networks to work with
- The need to develop robust partnerships with academic institutions, government bodies, professional organisations etc.. based on an equal footing.
- Encourage the development of research support services to give practitioners general and specific support in planning, conducting and disseminating research. The support should also give advice on ethics, standards for submission etc.
- Work closely with other WONCA networks and organisations
- The development and funding of practice based research networks working within rural areas
- Work with young and aspiring rural professionals, supporting them and encouraging them to engage with academic medicine with the intention of enrolling in further education and undertaking research
- Identify and rank priorities for research
- Tackle issues associated with the funding of research by
  - Trying to ensure that aspiring rural researchers can compete on a fair and equitable basis with more experienced researchers in the competitive environment of research funding
  - Helping to indentify seed monies which are earmarked and ring fenced for those starting out in the research field
  - Encourage the development of advice centres aimed at helping rural researchers access local, regional, national and international funds.
- Other countries should follow Spain's example and establish compulsory rural attachments in training. This experience needs to be supported and a positive experience
- Encourage the links with industry and the private sector in developing opportunities for funding research
- Increase the contribution of rural practitioners and rural research published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Look at the possibility of conducting comparative research between rural and urban practice
- Develop a European research network which can:
  - Share good practice
  - Standardise terminology
  - Use common electronic platforms etc....

EURIPA believes that rural patients have the right to the same quality of service that their urban counterparts have. A Quality strategy should include and highlight the following action points:

- Identify rights for rural GPs

- If you would like doctors and other clinicians to work in rural areas their personal and professional needs must be identified and they must be supported when they are there
- Address professional isolation
- There need to conduct some longitudinal studies over time working with people who have gone to work in rural areas
- Emphasize the value of care to the well being of rural communities
- Involve communities by asking what they want in terms of rural health services but providing full information (including information about provision of safe services and financial information)
- Need to provide quality services including access to specialists – the way of providing services may need to change
- Highlight the issues and increase publications in journals
- Improve the professional networking
- Develop multi professional collaboration
- Improve communication
- Work in international groups
- Need to develop high quality evidence base
- Collaborate with EU politicians (+ at national level)
- Doctors must do their own job and politicians their job
- The importance of introducing programmes and safeguards to avoid burn-out

EURIPA believes that education and training are crucial in developing a rural workforce, which is trained to deal with clinical problems that arise in the rural setting and is also sensitive to the cultural and social issues. An education and training strategy should include and highlight:

- A need to develop a workforce trained appropriately to meet the needs of rural communities. (In the light of the financial constraints that countries across Europe find themselves in, it is important that EURIPA explore how this can still be achieved in an environment of limited or no extra funding)
- Emphasise the importance of reflective, lifelong, adult and formative education for all health professionals
- Emphasise the importance of education and training in boosting recruitment and improving retention in rural areas.
- Use appropriate technology where applicable. Technology need not be expensive and should be off the shelf and available such as Skype, Wikis, Blogs etc
- Pursue the development of the Rural Generalist (Super generalist where appropriate)
- The purpose of education and training is to pursue personal development but also to aid service development.

- Explore the concept of the Welsh “Rural Campus” as an environment for learning on an international basis
- Ensure that education in a rural setting is a key element in the training of Tomorrow’s doctors
- Education aimed at highlighting environmental and sustainable issues should be incorporated into undergraduate curricula
- EURIPA recommends that training and education for rural practice be integrated in a horizontal and vertical manner. Horizontal integration involved developing programmes across disciplinary boundaries in a multi-professional way while vertical integration involves linking all the stages of medical education.
- EURIPA recommends the establishment of programmes based on all the vertical educational stages and include
  - Programmes to give school children exposure to the health sector through mentorship, educational events and work experience
  - All undergraduates should be exposed to rural practice during their training for as long as is feasible and as early as possible.
  - The establishment of rural training programmes for general practice/family medicine building on the extensive experience and information gathered across Europe in the medical literature and through organisations such as EGPRN, EURACT, Equip, Vasco de Gama etc...
  - Effective and accessible CPD for all health workers, using different learning methodologies to meet the local needs and individual learning styles
  - The development of retired expert programmes to utilise the skills, wisdom, experience and enthusiasm of retired practitioners in local, national and international settings
- Europe as many islands around its coastline and training in island health where appropriate provides a valuable tool in teaching undergraduates about the important elements of family practice.
- Considerable work has been carried out outside Europe (Australia, Canada, New Zealand etc..) and this should be utilised
- Revalidation is being introduced in certain countries across Europe and it is likely that this will eventually find its way to all European countries. The process of revalidation is closely linked with education and training and it is important that support services are present to help doctors prepare for revalidation and help those doctors identified as failing

Rural practitioners have not been very successful in the past in influencing policy. The 3 previous themes should contribute to EURIPA’s goal of developing a robust contribution to policy development across Europe and include the following action points:

- Rural Proofing is a powerful tool, which should be applied to all policies that have an impact on rural communities.
- The lack of evidence on rural health issues
- The challenge to get policy makers to understand that outcomes may be different, using the evidence

- Get attention and recognition by policy makers that rural is different in terms of how services are delivered
- How to attract younger people to come and work in rural areas – develop incentives, not necessarily funding
- The need to change attitudes of not only politicians but also clinicians – the way services are provided may need to change
- Change attitudes early on during clinical training
- Work with rural schools to begin “recruitment” early
- Provide support for rural clinicians
- There needs to be an influential lobbying group such as NRHA in the USA & Australia
- There should be engagement with the European Commission

EURIPA intends that this list should contribute to the development of a strategy Statement (? Majorca Manifesto)

**There is a need to challenge the status quo.**

**There is no generic solution**

Do you want to have a similar Forum meeting next year?

If yes, where should it be?

Can I add your address to the listserver?