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## **53 – “To Travel With Your Profession Is to Live and Learn”\*: Educational Exchanges in Family Medicine Training - the Hippocrates Exchange Programme**

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Since the beginning of western civilization travel has always been an essential part of the education of future generations. At first, there was the legendary Grand Tour, a rite of passage, which brought young British aristocrats in contact with the cultural legacy of classical antiquity and the Renaissance. Today, in times of standardized and mandatory schooling the Grand Tour is safer, often shorter, but equally valuable and enlightening; it takes the form of an exchange and it covers all stages of education, from lower and upper schooling to higher and post-graduate education (1).

In recent years, interest in international rotations has increased among students, at all levels and in every field of education. Correspondingly, many Universities around the world have acknowledged such a need and are now promoting exchanges and the internationalization of school curricula in the aim of preparing (their) students to a globalised world as well as work environment (2-4).

### **Exchange in General Practice/Family Medicine (GP/FM): The Hippocrates Exchange Programme**

Hippocrates is an exchange programme for medical doctors specialising in GP/FM and junior GPs/FPs within five years of completing specialty training. It offers the possibility of undertaking an inspiring journey to discover different primary care systems and educational environments.

Now thriving and well structured, the programme was first presented at the 6th European Conference on GP/FM (WONCA Europe) in Vienna in 2000, under the auspices of the European Academy of Teachers in GP/FM (EURACT), which has always had an important role in shaping and enhancing medical education in Family Medicine throughout Europe. In 2008 the programme was entrusted to the then established Vasco da Gama Movement (VdGM) which reviewed the scheme two years later and established a database along with a standardised framework to guarantee a beneficial and verifiable educational outcome for every exchange.

### **The Aims of Hippocrates**

The main objective of the Hippocrates Programme is to provide an enriched learning experience that promotes the acquisition of academic and clinical knowledge of

\* One of the earlier restless Danes, the famous Poet and Fairy-tale-writer Hans Christian Andersen said: “To travel is to live” and he described the enhanced sensitivity that characterises you when you are on unfamiliar territory. Now if you travel with your profession you are up for a double bonus – living and learning.

another health system and encourages mobility among junior doctors. Thus it offers a broader perspective to the concepts of GP/FM at both professional and personal levels for future GPs/FPs. Through these experiences, participants, visitors as well as GP/FP hosts, gain new perspectives that inspire them to undertake an active part in the development of GP/FM in their own country. In fact, the programme also contributes to enhance collaboration among national colleges of GP/FM and recruitment of young professionals to these important associations (5).

At the individual level, the benefits are numerous; some are open to any kind of exchange, while others are particular for an international clinical experience in a vocational setting. Most exchanges offer the opportunity to improve foreign language skills, challenge one's ability to adapt to new situations, developing an intercultural identity and establish friendships that are most likely to inspire throughout life (4). Moreover, the exposure to a different health system and GP/FM environment enhances professional skills, as well as improving academic knowledge and increase opportunities for subsequent employment (5).

## ***The Hippocrates framework***

Aimed at ensuring high quality educational content, the programme is set on a distinctive and standardised framework which entails a pre-exchange and post-exchange section.

### **Pre-exchange:**

Before embarking on an exchange, participants must reflect on the potential educational benefits.

- Learning objectives should be guided by the Visitor's own learning needs, respect their national vocational training curriculum and comply with the WONCA Definition of General Practice (6). Such educational goals need to be realistically achievable within the Educational Programme that the Host is able to offer and therefore shared and agreed on by both parties.
- Educational programme: Hippocrates exchanges are normally 2 weeks long. During this time the visitor will be introduced to many aspects of the local Primary Care system, mainly by shadowing all the host practice activities such as consultations, house visits, practice nurse clinics, and collaboration with other caregivers as well as special services. The exchange should ideally also entail visiting local Family Medicine training and research departments to meet and exchange views with homeland trainees. Where applicable, visitors will be encouraged to gain insight into local resources and quality improvement activities as well as local healthcare structures, such as the management of emergencies in primary care by attending an out-of-hours service run by GPs/FPs.

### **Post-exchange:**

Once back home the participant is asked to reflect on the experience and the professional and personal gains.

- Learning outcomes: participants are requested to reconsider the original learning objectives and discuss with the host the overall outcomes of the international experience.
- Final report: The participants are requested to make a comparison between their own country and that of their destination, considering different aspects of primary care and GP/FM, including the contextual, attitudinal and scientific ones. All participants are also encouraged to strive to present and publish their experiences locally, nationally and internationally (7).

## ***Hippocrates in numbers***

Over the years, the programme has grown extensively, from an initial pilot phase of five participating countries, the Hippocrates Programme today counts an extended network of hundreds of host practices in 26 European countries. The numbers of participants and completed exchanges has also increased consistently from 13 in 2010 to 83 in 2013.

## ***Prospects***

Further research on the impact of exchange programmes during GP/FM vocational training is needed to determine the actual educational value and outcomes of international rotations. However, the potential contribution of such schemes targeting future European FDs/GPs not only for personal development of individual participants but also to a greater collective professional identity of our profession is undoubtedly substantial. The authors believe that the Hippocrates

Programme has contributed considerably to the formation of the VdGM and consequently to the vitalisation of WONCA Europe. It has also been the inspiration for similar programmes of vocational exchange like the FM360 and thus has created resonance throughout the global GP/FM community.

Hippokrates is very much alive and all European trainees/GPs/FDs are encouraged to participate.

### Take home messages

- In a world of international travel and migration, educational institutions have been acknowledging the need for the internationalization of school curricula and the promotion of educational exchanges.
- Hippokrates is an exchange programme for medical doctors specialising in GP/FM and junior GPs/FPs within five years of completing specialty training.
- The Hippokrates Exchange Programme offers a standardised framework that helps deliver structured professional development to new and future GPs/FPs through international exchanges.
- Benefits are numerous at many levels for all participants, trainees as well as GP/FD Hosts.

### Original abstract

<http://www.woncaeurope.org/content/388-hippokrates-european-exchange-programme-medical-doctors-specializing-general>

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“To move, to breathe, to fly, to float,  
To gain all while you give,  
To roam the roads of lands remote,  
To travel is to live.”

Hans Christian Andersen, *The Fairy Tale of my Life: An Autobiography*