

Olapeju Simoyan

My Wonca Europe Experience



Firstly, I would like to commend the organizers of the Wonca Europe conference for their efforts. The conference was not only very well attended, but the sessions were very informative and covered a wide variety of relevant topics. The main reason I decided to attend the conference was because I had submitted an abstract for a poster presentation, at the suggestion of one of our faculty members. I was pleasantly surprised to receive an e-mail indicating that my abstract had been accepted! For me, this would be an amazing opportunity to visit Switzerland for the first time (besides airport layovers) and to gain exposure to European healthcare systems. In the past, I have had experience with health care systems in Africa and Asia, but had never had any real exposure to European health care systems. My residency program allows for participation in one-month international elective experiences so I decided to plan my elective experience to coincide with the Wonca conference.

I was very impressed by the hospitality of the Swiss doctors I met and interacted with. During the conference, Dr Max Handschin and his wife kindly offered to host me. (They live just outside Basel.) Prior to leaving Switzerland, I travelled to Chur, in the mountain region of Switzerland, where Dr Franz Marty and his family very graciously hosted me. I visited the multi-specialty group practice where he works and was impressed by the state-of-the-art facilities, including electronic medical records, on-site laboratory, radiographic equipment and pharmacy. Patients left the doctor's office, not with a script to be presented at a pharmacy, but with the actual medication the doctor had prescribed. I would imagine this has a positive effect on compliance rates. Radiographs were taken in-house and results were available in real time, which is an important consideration in terms of quality of patient care.

I also learned that Swiss primary care doctors face some of the same issues that we face in the US, including the need for more research in primary care. Another issue we share is the need for physician ad-

vocacy and I was impressed on learning that the lack of recognition of Family Medicine as an academic specialty in Switzerland was something that was recently changed – in response to the efforts of Swiss family doctors themselves. Perhaps most impressive was the fact that health insurance is mandatory in Switzerland – a situation that we are yet to achieve in the US. As I complete my residency and start my career in academic family medicine and public health, the things I learnt at the Wonca conference and during the rest of my stay in Switzerland and Europe will certainly remain with me, and I believe I will be a better person and a better physician as a result of this experience.

At the time of this writing, Dr Simoyan was a resident in the Family and Community Medicine Residency program that is jointly sponsored by Penn State Hershey Medical Center, Hershey, and The Good Samaritan Hospital, Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

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