

Two historic events for family medicine

For us generalists it is seldom that two such major events are announced so close to one another. On the world front there is an important joint statement by WHO and WONCA about family doctors. In South Africa the report on the inquiry into a national health insurance system has been released. I urge as many as possible to get hold of these reports and to respond directly to Drs Broomberg and Shisana. We are busy building a new structure and need to respond by the 18th of August, 1995.

A joint working party of WHO-WONCA met in Canada in November 1994. They produced a report entitled "Making Medical Practice and Education More Relevant to People's Needs: The Contribution of the Family Doctor." The report has now, by June 1995, been endorsed by both the General Assembly of the WHO and the World Council of WONCA. In essence it spells out the role that family doctors are able to play in primary health care worldwide. The Alma-Ata declaration of 1978 set WHO and much of the world, including our own Department of Health and many academics, on a path that, at best ignored and at worst denigrated, the role of the family or generalist doctor in primary health care. The endorsement of this WHO-WONCA working paper is a turnabout. It recognises that family doctors have a role and that they have to be given space as members of the team.

The Broomberg/Shisana report is there for us to look at and comment on. When the system is finally instituted it is likely to bring about a major redistribution of health care services, and is sure to make a major contribution to equity. The report also promotes a productive mix of public and private health systems to achieve its aim of getting comprehensive primary health care to all in the community within the district health care system. Please respond to this document. The detail is important and it is up for debate. Please make the effort.

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Herewith some addresses:

1. For the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into a National Health Insurance System: Dr J Broomberg and Dr O Shisana, Department of Health, Private Bag X828, Pretoria 0001. Fax: (012) 323-1980.
2. The WHO-WONCA working paper can be obtained from Charles Boelen, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Educational Development of Human Resources for Health, World Health Organisation Headquarters, CH-1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland or from Prof Wesley Earl Fabb, AM, World Organisation of Family Doctors, PO Box 790, Shantin Central NT, Hong Kong.