

## Trends at WONCA

Two things have struck me when listening to people returning from the World Congress of Family Physicians (WONCA) in July: a new interest in the environment and in rural medicine.

This issue contains a short report of the Wonca Congress held in Vancouver BC and abstracts of the South African contributions at the congress.

Dr Helen Caldicott from Australia made an impassioned plea for family physicians to get involved with the survival of our planet. There was immediate reaction as people started to form a grouping of family physicians who run their practices in an environmentally friendly way. This has implications for the use of disposable items for domestic and medical purposes, biodegradable detergents and encouraging patients to take environmental issues seriously.

A new body for the environment had already been formed in 1990. It is called the International Society of Doctors For Environment - ISDE. Its membership is made up of national ISDE associations and individual members; mostly from Europe, as its origins are in Switzerland. It is, however, rapidly spreading to become a worldwide movement.

Perhaps the time is right for family practitioners in South Africa to take an active interest in wider ecological issues. As people of privilege (for those who are not insolvent) we get to see nature's beauty spots more than most. I have seen places deteriorate, probably irreparably, since getting into the mountains as a student. We can be a catalyst for local

and global survival, which after all, is a health issue. Most problems of endangered species can be solved by ensuring a habitat that is large enough and unpolluted. To ensure this we have to work at issues of population, poverty and greed. Again, these are inextricably linked with health and survival.

At WONCA there was interest in rural doctors getting together and sharing their particular interests in recognition as a group and specific vocational training for working in rural areas. More and more people in rural practice in South Africa are starting to get organised. We look forward to them going from strength to strength. See further reports about the South African initiatives in the 8th Family Physicians Congress Supplement appearing with this edition of *SA Family Practice*.

*Sam Johnson*