

The Role of the Family Doctor

Two documents appear in this issue of SA Family Practice. The role of the General Practitioner/Family Physician in Health Care Systems, contains the studied and well considered views of the World Organisation of Family Doctors¹ and the other, The Role of the Doctor in Primary Health Care², the views of a broad spectrum of leading S African doctors.

In 1992 we hope to move both nationally and internationally closer to these ideals. Vocational Training for Family Physicians, of a high standard, available to all who intend practising in the field of family medicine/primary health care/general practice is the key to this future. Hopefully 1992 will be the year in which South Africa gets vocational training for family physicians on the statute book in line with the international community. This, however, will be of little value in the climate of economic stringency that we live in. Without a broad commitment from generalist doctors, the government, medical schools and our specialist colleagues the statutory requirement for vocational training will not become a reality.

A commitment to the establishment of vocational training means many things. It means a change of understanding with those doctors who believe that family practice is not a discipline but merely something that doctors do, which surgeons, internists, obstetricians and gynaecologists, paediatricians and psychiatrists have taught them to do. It means that posts will have to be used all over the country as training posts for vocational trainees and that there will be a sufficient number of senior posts redeployed as family physician posts to accommodate

those who will supervise and teach the trainees. It means that we in family practice will have to broaden our outlook and practise, to become true generalists who have an understanding of disease, the person, the family and community. It means that a large number of us will have to get involved in establishing training opportunities and investing our time into the future of the discipline of family practice.

It has been, and still remains, the Academy's view that medicine practised as defined in the two documents reprinted in this issue, gives the best outcome for those who entrust their health care to us. We believe it is the most cost effective way to promote health and deal with disease. It is further our intention to continue to develop vocational training opportunities in under-served areas to make a contribution towards redressing the imbalances present in our health care system.

References

1. WONCA. The Role of the General Practitioner/Family Physician in Health Care Systems S Afr Fam Pract 1992; 13:9-14.
2. The Role of the Doctor in Primary Health Care, Declaration. S Afr Fam Pract 1992;13:8.

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