

# Comment/ Kommentaar

## Thoughts at the Wonca Conference

by Boz Fehler

My period of office as speaker of this worthy organisation has left me with a sense of fulfilment for which I would like to express my gratitude. I hope that during my all-too-brief period of office I succeeded to some modest degree in fulfilling the ideals of our internationally recognised organisation, WONCA.

The basic strength of this institution lies in the fact that we, the members, are the doctors who dispense primary and continuing health care to the peoples of the world at large.

As such we are in a position to assist in alleviating the miseries to be found throughout our modern world - and perhaps even influence the politicians in our respective countries to accept more humanitarian views. Nevertheless, we as general practitioners must remain aloof from the devastating issues of politics. It behoves us, as members of the profession, to work together, discuss and examine the problems of primary health care, and find ways to help one another to ensure the health of all the peoples of the world irrespective of their land of origin, their colour, creed, or race.

To this end we must concern ourselves with a correct, equitable and proper distribution of not only health care and services, but also the promotion of health. Before leaving this ques-

tion I would like to ask: Would you be able to sleep peacefully if you knew that your neighbour and his children did not have enough to eat? I think not. I am from Africa and on this continent alone - and it is one of the more sparsely populated continents - there are 50 million people starving! To be one's brother's keeper, as our hippocratic oath expects, means more than simple giving alms to the poor to salve one's conscience. It demands a great deal more. It is necessary that we work together in a spirit of mutual helpfulness and co-operation.

It is imperative that we do not undermine each other.

We should regard the health of the whole human race as our starting point. Building on this humanitarian foundation, we, the primary care doctors of the world can provide tremendous help to the peoples of the world not only physically, psychologically, and spiritually but perhaps even economically and politically - albeit indirectly.

To enlarge on this theme of mutual aid: I suggest that it should be adopted as a firm principle of WONCA that no member country of WONCA should be prevented from sending delegates to visit another member country.

If anything, such visits should be encouraged and the

delegates welcomed with open arms.

The fact of WONCA's multiracial composition should be a source of strength rather than a bone of contention. For strengthening the bonds we have to supersede mere considerations of race.

One of our major tasks in WONCA is to act as catalysts. Assisting our colleagues throughout the continents of this earth to provide a primary health care of unsurpassing excellence to all peoples.

We must develop a partnership of doctors with a policy based on understanding, trust, goodwill, self-determination - indeed we must regard ourselves as partners in progress.

We must strive towards the institution of internationally recognised standards of expertise among those doctors concerned with general practice and family medicine. At present, through the WONCA sub-committee of classifications, we are well advanced with the preparation of an international glossary of terminology and definitions and also a classification of ailments seen in primary care situations.

Thus a start is being made in achieving this objective.

Perhaps in the future we will have an internationally standardised and recognised post

graduate examination in family medicine and general practice.

As primary health care is what brings us together and holds us together, the policy of WONCA must continue to be one of mutual assistance and guidance to all nations in regard to future needs in this sphere, in both the academic and practical areas.

In WONCA we have an international band of doctors who are driven by idealism, an idealism rooted in an undeniable love of their work and a burning desire to improve the health standards of the people under their care. This love to which I refer, is not boastful, not arrogant, and does not seek to boost one's own interest or image, it is simply a compulsion to help our fellow man in his time of need.

- We are realists and do not live only for today.

- We are planning for tomorrow.

- We are making provision for the future!

- We as the providers of primary health care on this earth can be justly proud of our achievements.

By continuing to abide by the ideals of WONCA and by extending to each other free, willing co-operation we can look forward to achieving our ideal of improved health for the peoples of this world - our patients.

Boz Fehler