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Impact of young-doctors movement exchange program on junior GPs: a qualitative research

Ronen Brand(1), N van Moppes(2)

(1) Department of Family Medicine, Clalit Health Services, Haifa and Western Galilee, Israel

(2) University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Corresponding author: Dr Ronen Brand, Clalit Health Services, Department of Family Medicine, Haifa and Western Galilee Dis, Moshav Avdon, Israel. E-mail: br.ronen@gmail.com

Backgrounds and Aims: To date, the Vasco da Gama movement (WONCA Europe group for junior GPs) has representatives coming from 30 countries, enabling the movement to bring together GPs from diverse cultural backgrounds and different health systems. One of the ways to facilitate knowledge and skill exchange is conference-exchanges, which are organized around a national conference of GPs in a hosting country and include a few days visit to a local GP office.

in this research we explored the values that justify the expense of organizing and attending international conference-exchanges for junior GPs.

Methods: Our qualitative study included 25 participants from different European countries registered for the conference-exchange in Israel, March 2014.

We sent an open-ended questionnaire to the participants asking about experiences with former conference-exchanges, obstacles to participation and use of other peer-learning methods. From the received answers we deducted a topic list for a focusgroup, held during the conference. We analyzed the data, obtained from the questionnaires and focusgroup, to come to conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Results: Questionnaire was answered by 15 GPs from 11 nationalities. Former experiences from conference-exchanges have been said to yield many practice tips, contacts with new colleagues, enhanced cross-cultural skills and created open attitude. Obstacles to participation were financial, days off work limit and finding replacement for the clinic back home. 90% stated they don't believe social media can replace learning made through conference-exchanges.

The focusgroup explored noticeable reactions on the questionnaire: exchange program' benefits come mainly from valuable personal contacts, learning at the site, comparing health systems and getting a more open minded attitude. Anti-burn-out effect was marked.

Conclusion: Conference exchanges seem to be beneficial and not replacable by social media. Further study is warranted to validate research results.