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Family doctors' knowledge of and attitudes towards migrant healthcare across Europe and beyond

Hannah Fox(1,2), EYH Tang(1,3), D Shah(1), C Gajria(1)

(1) Junior International Committee, Royal College of General Practitioners, UK

(2) Queensbridge Group Practice, Hackney, London, UK

(3) Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK

Corresponding author: Dr Deepa Shah, Junior International Committee, RCGP, London, UK. E-mail: deepashah83@hotmail.com

Background & Aim: The current refugee crisis is the biggest humanitarian emergency Europe has faced since the Second World War. WONCA Europe released a statement urging governments to take action 'so that all people living permanently or temporarily in Europe will have access to equitable, affordable and high-quality health care services'. The aim of this survey was to explore family doctors' knowledge and attitudes towards migrant health needs and access to healthcare in their own countries.

Method: During WONCA Istanbul conference (2015), the RCGP Junior International committee conducted a survey of family doctors. The survey consisted of seventeen questions, including demographics and questions regarding knowledge of healthcare systems and entitlement of migrant groups to healthcare, as well as personal experiences.

Results: There were forty-five respondents (predominantly family doctor trainees) from nineteen countries around the world. Whilst almost all claimed to have a good understanding of the healthcare system in their country, 46% were not aware of the entitlement of different migrant groups. 61% had an awareness of the health needs of migrants. Importantly, 90% of family doctors surveyed felt that vulnerable migrants should be entitled to free primary care. However, there was mixed opinion regarding how services should be delivered – 27% felt charitable organisations should be responsible, 44% disagreed. A quarter of doctors had directly experienced patients being denied healthcare because of their immigration status.

Conclusions: The majority of family doctors surveyed during WONCA Istanbul felt that vulnerable migrants should be entitled to free primary care. Although over 90% of respondents stated they understood their healthcare system, almost half were not aware of the current entitlement of different migrant groups. This survey demonstrates that doctors' attitudes are in line with the official WONCA statement urging governments to take responsibility for healthcare needs of migrants.