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The experiences and attitudes towards international primary care amongst Family doctors across Europe

Eugene Tang(1,2), H Fox(2)

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

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

Corresponding author: Dr Eugene Tang, Newcastle University, Institute of Health And Society, Newcastle, UK. E-mail: e.y.h.tang@newcastle.ac.uk

Background: There has been growing interest in collaborating and learning from alternative health systems across and beyond Europe. This has led to innovative practices such as the Hippokrates and Family Medicine 360° exchange programmes. However, not all family doctors have the opportunity to experience these exchanges nor is it clear what the overall experience of family doctors tend to be across Europe in international primary care settings.

Methods: We surveyed family doctors and trainees at an annual International Conference on their postgraduate experiences and attitudes towards international primary care in their respective countries.

Results: We received forty-two respondents: 32 were family doctor trainees, 8 were family doctors within their first five years of training, one medical student and one family doctor. The majority of those surveyed did not receive teaching on international health at medical school (59.5%) or during their training as a family doctor (56.1%). This is despite the fact that over half (53.7%) of the respondents would like to work overseas in the future. Experiences in international primary care is viewed positively within family medicine with the majority (78.6%) of respondents expressing that they would like more opportunities to incorporate international health into their careers. Suggestions on improving the exposure to international health included more education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (including making it as a mandatory part of training), more exchange programmes and more exposure to sources of information regarding these issues.

Conclusions: This brief scoping survey has found an overall positive attitude towards experiences in international primary care amongst family doctors across Europe. This is despite the fact that there is little exposure to the subject throughout training. Further work needs to be done to increase both exposure and opportunities in international health.