

## European General Practice Research Workshop (EGPRW)

*Is International Cooperation Worth While?*

DAG BRUUSGAARD

*Department of General Practice, University of Oslo, Norway*

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General practice is a novice in the academic world. We need to stand together both nationally and internationally to establish general practice as a true academical discipline. To strengthen our credibility we have to do research of high quality. European General Practice Research Workshop (EGPRW) is a partly unformal international body with the aim "to encourage research, to foster and coordinate multinational studies, to exchange experiences and with it develop a validated international scientific base for general practice". The group was established November 1974 and the activities during its short existence are summarised and commented.

**Key words:** international cooperation, research.

Dag Bruusgaard, MD. Frederik Stangs gate 11/13. 0264 Oslo 2, Norway.

In Norway academic general practice has slowly been built up throughout the last 15 years. It has been an intellectual struggle to identify general practice as a true academic discipline and an even harder struggle to convince the universities that general practice ought to be an important part of undergraduate teaching and that general practice deserves support for doing research.

We have a very close cooperation between the small institutes of general practice at our four medical schools. We have felt the need to give each other mutual support in the very important period of establishment. To be academic freshmen in the partly hostile academic world is a lonesome venture. Just recently (1983) we have got our College of General Practitioners.

When the problems at home have been overwhelming it has been worthwhile to go abroad to get even more support, by experiencing that: You meet persons with exactly the same frustrations as you have yourself. What you have achieved yourself, whatever limited, is not so bad after all. This makes it easier to come back home and stand up with new vigour in the attempts to persuade your possible benefactors.

Just to identify the fact that "my problems are bad, but others, might be even worse" is not reason enough to spend time and money to go abroad. It is

not just to seek care from people with the same problems as yourself, but also seeking professional support from people with more skills and more knowledge than yourself.

General practice including academic general practice, in the different countries all over the globe has drawn advantage of an international trend (strongly supported by WHO) claiming that primary health care should be strengthened. National colleges and international organisations are the answer to the need for cooperation to promote academic general practice.

In spite of the existence of organizations as SIMG and WONCA, some of the veterans in European general practice gathered in Leeuwenhorst, the Netherlands in 1969, and decided to establish informal committees to work further on education and research. European General Practice Research Workshop (EGPRW) was officially established five years later in 1974 in London at a meeting with representatives from eight different countries (United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, West-Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway).

According to the statutes, article two:

The aims of the EGPRW are to encourage research, to foster and coordinate multinational studies, to exchange experiences and with it develop a validated international scientific base for general practice.

Table I. *European general practice research workshop (EGPRW). Activities 1974-1986*

| <i>Meetings</i>         |           |      |                   |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|-------------------|
| No. 1                   | November  | 1974 | London            |
| No. 2                   | May       | 1975 | Antwerp           |
| No. 3                   | April     | 1976 | London            |
| No. 4                   | January   | 1977 | Amsterdam         |
| No. 5                   | May       | 1977 | Marburg           |
| No. 6                   | January   | 1978 | Helsingør         |
| No. 7                   | May       | 1978 | Montreux          |
| No. 8                   | February  | 1979 | Paris             |
| No. 9                   | November  | 1979 | Oslo              |
| No. 10                  | April     | 1980 | Antwerp           |
| No. 11                  | November  | 1980 | London            |
| No. 12                  | May/June  | 1981 | Vienna            |
| No. 13                  | November  | 1981 | Göttingen         |
| No. 14                  | April     | 1982 | den Haag          |
| No. 15                  | October   | 1982 | Stratford-on-Avon |
| No. 16                  | April     | 1983 | Stockholm         |
| No. 17                  | October   | 1983 | Rheinfelden       |
| No. 18                  | May       | 1984 | Antwerp           |
| No. 19                  | October   | 1984 | Frankfurt         |
| No. 20                  | May       | 1985 | Porto             |
| No. 21                  | May       | 1986 | Florenze          |
| <i>Research courses</i> |           |      |                   |
| No. I                   | September | 1979 | London            |
| No. II                  | November  | 1985 | London            |
| <i>Research days</i>    |           |      |                   |
| No. I                   | September | 1985 | Klagenfurt        |
| No. II                  | September | 1986 | Klagenfurt        |

Article three gives the ways of realization of the aims:

The aims of the foundation will be pursued through: a. the exchange of results and methods of research in Europe and other relevant information; b. the organisation of international meetings; c. the encouraging of research in and into general practice among other things by: establishing joint definitions, developing relevant methodology for research, developing, planning and pursuing multinational research projects.

The evaluation of the workshop's activity should be quite simple. General practice research has never been so extensive, so good and so exiting as it has been the last ten years. A strong covariation obviously exists, proving a causality is alas a bit more complicated. EGPRW should be described as part of a flourishing of academic general practice, being itself a result of an international trend it has also strengthened the same trend.

As to the statutes it is most easy to document that we have pursued article 3 § b "... organisation

of international meetings". Altogether EGPRW has arranged 20 meetings in 12 different countries, and two research-courses out of which the last one in cooperation with WHO, Europe. A core of enthusiasts have met twice a year, one national coordinator from every participating country and anyone else being interested in the work of the group as such or in special topics.

The Workshop has been a place where different ways of scientific approaches to general practice has met. We have had friendly, but often sharp confrontations between the "number-oriented" British traditions ("I know you because I have counted you") and the more philosophical and humanistic traditions in the german speaking countries ("our holistic approach needs a paradigm shift"). The positivistic British way of doing general practice research is still in the leading position inside the group and had great impact of the "Credo" of the group published in 1983 (1).

The language of the group has been English and this together with the level of development of primary health care and general practice in the different countries has had a significant impact on which countries have joined the group. The last years we have made efforts to include the Mediterranean countries, having the last meeting in May 1985 in Porto, Portugal. The spring-meeting 1986 will be held in Florenz, Italy. The next step will be to try to get better contact with the countries in Eastern Europe.

During the period the group has been involved in several limited multinational studies of topics as: Low back pain, Immunization, Dyspepsia, The denominator problem, Referrals, The use of time in general practice, Vaginal discharge.

Members of the group have, post or propter been actively involved in building up general practice research at a national level (2-11). During its existence the group has gathered a substantial knowledge of how general practice is run in different European countries with special emphasis on national peculiarities and international differences and its consequences for research.

The workshop has from the very first meeting discussed multinational comparative studies at a rather complicated level. It looks like we are at the edge of succeeding in doing this with a project analyzing the interface between general practice and specialistic care in European countries, a project supported by the EEC and WHO-Europe (13).

We have experienced that official statistics describing general practice and primary health care are scarce and often misleading. To describe and understand similarities and differences between countries we have to go back to the sources. We believe that general practitioners probably are the persons working inside the health care system having the best overview. This will be of great importance in the project and general practitioners will be the most important source of information. In doing this the network of contacts, the personal relationship and the vast amount of knowledge and understanding of what is going on in the different European countries have been of great importance.

Starting out we went to the Mecca of general practice—Royal College of General Practitioners in Princess Gate, London. Representatives from different countries joined the group first of all to have the possibility to learn from the British experience. Much has happened since. Now we meet all over Europe groups of eager general practitioners with or without academic positions working hard with “developing a validated scientific base for general practice”. We can now learn from each other, share experiences and ideas.

We all feel happy facing the possibility of running an extensive multinational study in the name of European General Practice Research Workshop and in collaboration with EEC and WHO. In spite of this, the more informal part, meeting people interested in research has been a great stimulus for everyone of the members and has hopefully been of value for the most important work inside the different countries.

EGPRW is an independent body and wishes to continue to be so. We have, however, approached SIMG and has worked together during the last few years. EGPRW was involved in SIMG's research course in Antwerp 1984 and was responsible for the research day at the Klagenfurt-Congress, autumn 1985. Compared to what was going on 10–20 years ago, general practice research is today developing at an impressive speed in most countries in Europe. On the other hand putting it all in a historical perspective we have just started building up our academic credibility, we have just started crawling and we should be careful with being too proud of what has been achieved so far. We have still a long way to go, and we still need academic discussions trying to develop the theoretical, scientific fundament of general practice.

At the same time general practice is the part of medicine where we every day meet problems not fitting the present medical paradigm. Therefore, in general practice more than in most other fields of medicine we need scientific re-thinking, and to meet the challenge of working out new and untraditional methods. This should be done inside the head of seriously and hard thinking general practitioners all over the world. Thoughts and ideas must however be tested in discussions with colleagues, both nationally and internationally.

The following are at present national coordinators: Z. Azeredo, Portugal; G. Barro, Italy; M. Berber, Republic of Ireland; D. Bruusgaard, Norway (chairman); K. Jork, West-Germany (vice-chairman); M. Katic, Yugoslavia; E. V. Kuenssberg, United Kingdom; U. K. Lammi, Finland; B. Linder, Sweden; R. Maes, Belgium; R. L. Meyer, Switzerland; G. Almind, Denmark; Th. J. van Stockum, The Netherlands; M. Szatmari, Hungary; H. Tönies, Austria (hon. secretary); Y. Yodfat, Israel; R. Hull, United Kingdom (hon. Treasurer).

*Administrative secretary:* Mrs V. C. Duncan, 570 Strathmartine Road, Dundee DD3 9QP, United Kingdom.

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