

Final Report - Hippokrates Exchange Programme

Dates of Exchange: From: 10/04/2011 - 22/04/201

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I took a part in Hippokrates exchange programme as a young fully qualified GP or a specialist in family medicine, 1 year after my final exam. I am very glad and thankful that I had a chance to fulfil my long wish of going abroad and seeing my profession from different perspective. As a trainee and as a GP I have been mostly involved in treatment of accident and emergency (A&E) cases but nevertheless I am very much familiar with a real situation in primary health care in Slovenia in general. This visit to London, UK was as such a unique opportunity to compare two different health care systems and the role of GP within them. There are quite a few things which I found different and illuminating in UK compared to Slovenia but none of them has anything to do with the professional level of GPs where I think we all work very well and follow the international guidelines. Most of them are related to management of national health service on all levels starting from the Ministry for health and all the way down to GP practices where I spent most of my time-being in UK. The biggest and the most important advantage of British system I found is that doctors in UK indeed have enough time to see a patient, though the British GPs might disagree on that. Compared to what we have in Slovenia patient gets a double-time appointment at his doctor who can then act as a real doctor using his best skills and abilities to help one instead of being just a referral doctor.

From what I got to know it used to be in UK like in Slovenia today some 20 years ago. GPs were looked down on them from their clinical colleagues and also from the media since the society itself valued only clinical doctors and only their work so public opinion was very much negative. Soon the society faced a huge lack of GPs what confronted the British government with a reality who was obliged to take some measures. They managed to fill some practices with GPs from India, Pakistan and other Asian countries but still that was not enough. What followed was that all GPs were given much higher salaries and different health care assisting professions (nurse practitioner, medical assistant,...) were introduced into GP practices. Gradually things changed with time and nowadays training to become a GP is on high demand by young doctors. Moreover the primary level of health care system as such has acquired the most important role within the system, also from the financial cost-benefit perspective. Today's standards in UK are from my point of view the right way that Slovenia should follow in order to make the best for its GPs and for its people.

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Regarding these more or less recent changes in UK I must stress the importance of assisting professions in practices since only with their help GP would be able to serve his patients at his best. In Slovenia we don't have administration officers in GP practices at all and nurses must do their job instead doing what they have been trained for. Beside this GPs in Slovenia are facing a huge administrative burden as well what again reduces the time available to see a patient. What I mean is obligatory appointment at one's GP due to sick leave for every single day compared to 7 days in UK, referral letters to benefit agencies due to prolonged sick leaves compared to automatic tracking of such patients in UK, etc.

IT support in UK is another thing to stress which is quite advanced for Slovenia. All the patient's files are stored electronically, all the referral letters are send electronically, all the medicine database is available on-line not to mention the online professional assistance for GPs and patients with lots of information on different diseases from professional and lay-person perspective.

I am very convinced that being a patient either in UK or in Slovenia wouldn't mean any difference at all in terms of professional care but being a GP either in UK or in Slovenia makes a difference in the life expectancy of GP in the very end of everything. I can say that this unique chance to go to London did not make me feel depressed on what we have in Slovenia but gave me a broader perspective and vigour to make changes possible.

If there is a will there is a way.