

Professor Michael Kidd - WONCA inauguration speech 2013

Delivered 27 June 2013

When my young niece overheard that I was taking on this role as president of the World Organization of Family Doctors, she said, "Are you going to be the world's family doctor? How cool is that." Well the role is pretty cool, but not quite as she imagines. It is an extraordinary honour to be elected to lead this organization that represents all of us, the family doctors of the world.

In addition to my niece's support, from all your messages and generous words I know that I come to this role with the support of colleagues and friends from all over the world. It reinforces for me the strong supportive culture among family doctors that flourishes within WONCA. I know that I am not alone in this role. The challenges we face in family medicine and general practice, we face together.

In the words of our very first WONCA president, another Australian, Dr Monty Kent Hughes, speaking to the first WONCA meeting in 1972: "the future of our professional discipline will depend on our ability to work together in the service of humanity."

And that's what the members of the member organisations of WONCA have been doing ever since - working together to improve the quality of life of the people of the world through high quality family medicine.

WONCA has come a long way since 1972. We now have 118 Member Organisations representing over 400,000 family doctors in over 130 countries and territories around the world.

Over 400,000 family doctors, including all those of us here, who each year have over 2 billion consultations with our patients. Two billion. That's the scope of our current work and our influence.

As your president I will continue the tradition of being a strong vocal advocate for family medicine around the world.

With your support I will work with your member organisations to continue to expand the role of family medicine worldwide.

Primary health care is no longer a set of words; it is something you and I live and breathe every day. Everyone worldwide has a right to this care. Your new executive and I will be working tirelessly with you towards achieving universal coverage in each of our countries, and strengthening our important work with the World Health Organization at global and regional levels.

The young people of the world are our future. I look forward to working with our young doctor groups to support our family medicine leaders of the future.

I first became a part of the WONCA family 24 years ago when I attended my first WONCA world conference in Jerusalem in 1989. I was a family medicine trainee at the time.

Maybe this is your first WONCA conference and maybe in 24 years time you will be standing here. I invite you to take that first step and get involved in the work that we do. Be active in your national college and your region, join one of our working parties, join one of our special interest groups, keep coming to our conferences, share your ideas and your energy and your passion.

It's not all serious though. Family doctors know how to work hard and we know that if we are going to stay resilient that we also need to take time to relax and recharge. I hope to meet many of you during this week and work out ways that we can all celebrate the many achievements of family doctors around the world.

We do have serious work to do. We must all reinforce the role of family medicine in providing high quality primary care to all people in each of our countries, especially those who are marginalised and the most vulnerable.

Connectedness is important and whilst we are here together let us remember our colleagues who are less fortunate and cannot be with us this week.

They are not forgotten. We need to find ways to engage everyone in our global family.

And so I am pleased to announce the launch today of WONCA's new social media platform. I invite you to join me, through the WONCA website, on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and discover new ways that we can work together to achieve our goals. Details are on our website: www.globalfamilydoctor.com

Just a moment. Sometime has just tweeted me already! Who was that?

This may all seem like an ambitious agenda but it builds on the great work of WONCA over the past forty years. As your new president I have the privilege to follow the previous leaders of our profession who have brought us to where we are today.

One of these leaders stands beside me. Our now immediate past president, Richard Roberts. Rich, I have had the opportunity to watch your leadership over the past three years. You set an impressive precedent crisscrossing the world working for WONCA and international primary care. As family doctors, we don't often give our peers standing ovations but I invite everyone here to stand with me and acknowledge our retiring president, Rich Roberts.

Changes and challenges are emotional times... and I know I wouldn't be here in this position without the support of a great many people.

I thank my biological and global families, many of you here today, especially my partner AI, here in the front row, and our family watching this ceremony live back in Australia.

I thank my many mentors and colleagues who have provided me with support and guidance and advice over the years, and continue to do so. Some of you are in this room today, some are no longer with us but your wise words remain with me. As a teacher, I especially thank my students and my family medicine trainees who test my viewpoints and help to keep me focused on the challenges of contemporary health care. And no thank yous would be complete without thanking my patients, who have taught me over the past 30 years how to be a better doctor and a better person.

There is a golden opportunity right now for family medicine as the nations of the world wake up to the need to strengthen their systems of primary care to better meet the current and future health needs of their people.

I am sure the time is right for us to work together to seize the opportunity to make a difference. I look forward to working with you all over the coming three years.

Thank you.

Blog www.globalfamilydoctor.com

Twitter @WONCApresident

LinkedIn WONCA company

Facebook WONCA president