

THE MALAGA STATEMENT



A joint policy statement by the Spanish Society of Family and Community Medicine (semFYC) and European Region of The World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians (Wonca)

Primary care as a sustainable way to improve the efficiency of national health systems

Thirty years ago, developing primary health care was presented as a need for health systems that sought to promote a series of values, principles and approaches aimed at improving public health standards. This new care model, which has been gradually introduced in all countries and has helped to improve equality, accessibility and efficiency, is based on a holistic vision of health which goes far beyond the limited medical model. As a result, several goals are achieved: improved health, decreased morbidity, increased equality and a substantial rise in the efficacy and efficiency of health systems.

The problem lies in the fact that health systems and health promotion programmes have become a mosaic of disparate components. This is true, particularly, in the rich countries, where there is excessive specialisation and where, often, primary care is not the axis around which the health system revolves. Resources are largely reserved for hospital services, and health promotion and prevention activities are neglected. In short, such health systems are less efficient and effective than they could be.

Growing challenges, such as population ageing and the enormous impact of chronic illnesses, new emerging diseases and the recent pandemics that the world has suffered show clearly that health models need to undergo a substantial change in direction if their sustainability is not to be compromised.

Primary care provides a way of ordering and organising health care as a whole through a community-based vision in which health prevention and promotion and a holistic approach to illness are paramount. This is in line with the *World Health Assembly resolution WHA 62.12* called "Primary Health care, including health system strengthening". As a result, primary care forms a sustainable, evident and efficient way of resolving health and health care problems. In this way disease specific programs, when relevant for population health, would automatically become integrated in a wider health care frame (Wonca/TUFH action 15 by 2015).

The above description shows clearly that primary health care is the ideal field in which future family doctors should learn their profession. Consequently, the education and university systems should be structured appropriately in order to provide a response to this need.

On the grounds of these reasons, Wonca Europe calls on European state governments that are currently making budget adjustments to make primary care a priority gateway to their national health systems, and to adjust their health care expenditure in line with this goal.

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