



ICPCM Newsletter

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Well-being and Burn-out

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This was the main theme of the 12th Geneva Conference on Person Centered Medicine on 25-27 March 2019. Its program director was Robert Cloninger, professor of psychiatry, psychology, and genetics at Washington University in St. Louis, USA. The Board of the International College on Person Centered Medicine (ICPCM) was also closely involved in organizing the conference.

Physician burn out seems to be increasing everywhere irrespective of the economics of the country but the knowledge of its frequency and severity differs. In the *"2019 Geneva Declaration on Person-centered Promotion of Well-being and Overcoming Burn-out"* it is stated: "Symptoms of burnout are more frequent among physicians than other professionals outside of healthcare. Burnout is the erosion of a person's sense of value, dignity, spirit, and will. Burnout is measured by physical exhaustion (feeling tired, drained, exhausted), a low sense of personal accomplishment (not having a positive influence, feeling unsatisfied or unfulfilled), and feeling dehumanized or depersonalized (causing the individual to become callous, treating others as impersonal objects, not caring about the welfare of others)". This is a description of a serious condition and consequently, of great concern for health professionals and health authorities alike, but the response differs. There are two ways to respond to this grave situation, to amend its cause or to work with the consequence, but in reality, both approaches must be used. The ultimate goal, irrespective of the means, is to reach the status of well-being for all health professionals as this will also increase immensely the quality of service given to those in need. Well-being is described in the Declaration as "a state of complete physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health. Well-being is measured in terms of physical vitality, positive emotional and cognitive functioning, and virtuous behaviour (e.g. moderation, compassion, altruism), which involves service to others as persons with intrinsic dignity and value". Even though resilience of health care workers is important, there must be a common view of health care in order to prevent burn-out. This is addressed in the first sentence of the first recommendation of the

Declaration: “The common vision of health care must be person-centered.” The Declaration goes on and describes in nine recommendations the various means of battling this grave situation. The Declaration will be published soon on the web-site of the ICPCM, <https://www.personcenteredmedicine.org/>

Dr. Leonid Eidelman, sitting president of the World Medical Association, described in his presentation at the 12th Geneva Conference the views of the World Medical Association (WMA). This is reflected in “The WMA Statement on Physicians Well-being” adopted in 2014. To give a glimpse into its content, this is stated in one of the recommendations: “Physicians have the right to working conditions that help limit the risk of burnout and empower them to care for their personal health by balancing their professional medical commitments and their private lives and responsibilities.” Furthermore: “Relevant organizations should constructively address professional autonomy and work-life balance problems and involve physicians in making decisions about their work lives”. There needs to be a three pillar approach, Dr. Eidelman stated, on the Societal, Organizational and Individual levels.

When analyzing the causes of burn-out, it stands out that in the modern technical, fragmented and process driven health care, there are factors that dehumanize interpersonal relationships, limit the creativity, autonomy or plasticity of persons and lead to a downward spiral into ill-being and burn-out (Robert Cloninger, 12th Geneva Conference 2019). To overcome this demise there is a need to turn to our roots in medicine, building on the physician-patient relationship that in a broader sense describes also the relationship of other health professionals. In addition, we need to acknowledge the fact that in medicine today many more health professionals are treating and caring for patients than in earlier days and for that reason, inter-professional relationship needs to come into play. This needs to start in pre-graduate education with increasing focus on inter-professional teaching and training and continue into the multidisciplinary team-work that constitutes modern health care.

The Board of the ICPCM has now decided that well-being as a goal for better health care will be a central theme in the coming events of the College. The various means for reaching this goal will be the content of the upcoming ICPCM meetings. It has been decided to have “Self-care and Well-being” as the central theme of the 13th Geneva Conference on April 27-29, 2020. Preparations have already started and a group of organizers is being set-up.

The ICPCM is this way continuing to work for increased person centeredness in medicine as a whole.