

## Correspondence

### General practice is still an inferior medical specialty in Greece

To the Editor

We have read with interest the article of "Family medicine in Turkey. Need for trainers in general practice" by Basak and Gulda.<sup>1</sup> The problems that they describe seem to associate with the problems that General Practice (GP) confronts in our country, Greece. Although there is a large need for General Practitioners in Greece, most of the medical students choose careers in other medical areas. Since 1986, when GP was established as an independent medical specialty, the attention of policy makers was focused on how to direct new medical graduates to choose GP as a career in order to provide primary health care for the country's rural and recently urban population. However, the focus of policy on improving the training of General Practitioners and on providing incentives to make the career attractive did not extend to encourage the creation of departments of GP in medical schools and the inclusion of GP or Primary Health Care in the medical curriculum. It should be stressed that although there is an increasing need for General Practitioners worldwide, few medical students are choosing this medical specialty in Europe and North America. As evidenced by the Canadian Residency Matching Service reports in 1982, approximately 40% of Canadian medical students made GP their first choice for residency training.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, this proportion had fallen to 32%, and by 2002 to 29%. A similar picture is described in the United States.<sup>3</sup> There the proportion of medical school graduates selecting GP fell from a peak of 17.3% in 1997 to 9.2% in 2003. Although there is a notable decline in the proportions of General Practitioners in the above 2 countries, such percentages are considered very high for the present situation in Greece. Currently, the proportion of medical students in Greece choosing GP for specialization is as low as approximately 3.1%.<sup>4</sup>

The reasons why medical school graduates do not choose GP in Greece, has not yet been investigated. It is speculated, that part of the problem is due to the fact that the Greek healthcare system follows the trend towards super-specialized practice, made necessary by the explosion of new knowledge in the field of bio-medical research, and made attractive by

its better 'market value'.<sup>5</sup> However, the extremely low interest exhibited by Greek medical students is considered worthy for further investigation. It should be noted that at the present time in Greece, General Practitioners are the only medical specialists who have a secure career since they are appointed immediately after accreditation as a specialist to a tenured post in the Health Centres of the National Health System in rural Greece, where only approximately 1200 such posts out of 2700 are filled by specialists in GP. No other medical specialty has similar benefits in Greece today.

The main way to improve the status of GP is to establish a university department, as the case with all the other medical specialties in Greek and European Universities. This department should educate medical students in GP issues, recruit and train GP residents, offer post-graduate studies, and care for the improvement of all Primary Health Care services in the country.<sup>6</sup>

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#### Reply from the Author

No reply was received from the Author.

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