

Successful Cross-Border Education and Training: The Example of Sanicademia – International Training Academy for Health Professionals, EEIG

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BACKGROUND TO SANICADEMIA: THE FOUNDATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRAINING ACADEMY FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS EEIG

In a period of increased professional mobility, qualifications and training programmes which are valid across borders and are internationally recognised are becoming increasingly important. Traveling abroad for pleasure, education and research or work has become a natural part of life for many European citizens. Products and services can be bought in another member state when the need arises, but obtaining healthcare outside their residence country is still problematic for most European citizens.

One of the main challenges for many Italian regions in the realm of health care is the lack of health professionals, mainly paediatricians and nurses. In response to this need and as a result of long-term cooperation between the northeast Italian regions Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and the Austrian state of Carinthia, Sanicademia was created as an interdisciplinary centre for the education and further training of health professionals. Health ministers from the three partner regions signed a basic political agreement for the establishment of the academy in September 2005. A year later in 2006, the International Training Academy for Health Professionals or »Sanicademia« was officially established as an EEIG (European Economic Interest Grouping) within the framework of an Interreg IVa supported project, »cross-border collaboration in patient care«. The Academy initially obtained a financial injection from the EU of € 830,000 over a 3 year period, and was officially added to the register of companies at the Chamber of Commerce in Klagenfurt.

Collaborating partners are the Austrian region of Carinthia, the Italian autonomous region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the Italian region of Veneto, IAL Friuli-Venezia Giulia (a public-funded professional education organisation under private law), E.N.A.I.P. (a foundation for professional education, established by the federation of Italian Christian Workers Associations). The catchment area in which Sanicademia is operating consists of some 5,5 million inhabitants and over 70,000 employees employed in the health sector.

Sanicademia has its headquarters in Villach and branch offices in Trieste and Venice. Besides the cross-border education and further training, focus is placed on improving the quality of education and training in different areas of the health care system through the organisation of jointly designed practical and educational training programmes, language courses, student exchange schemes, international congresses and seminars and scientific workshops. Mutual support is provided to enable the best possible professional development across various health professional profiles and to build an international interdisciplinary centre for training and further education in the health sector. Another important part of the academy's activities is to facilitate and coordinate cross-border information exchange and planning and to support members in their participation in inter-regional and international cooperation projects in the health sector.

The academy is financed by a yearly membership fee of € 25,000 paid to the headquarters of Sanicademia in Villach by each of the collaborating partners, together with earnings from conferences, congresses, training fee incomings and European project financing.

SANICADEMIA'S RESPONSE TO NEW EUROPEAN HEALTH CHALLENGES

EU health systems have to perform a difficult balancing act, firstly between increasing demands on health services and restricted supply and secondly between the need to respond to people's health needs locally, but also to be prepared for major Public Health crises. Today, there are a number of challenges facing health systems in Europe: firstly, policy makers and health authorities have to face the challenge of adapting their healthcare systems to an increasingly ageing population, which brings with it a series of demographic and socio-economic as well as health challenges. Between 2009 and 2060 the population of the EU-27 aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 66.9 million and the »very old« (80+) will be the fastest growing segment of the population. As the elderly population grows, the burden on health systems across member states increases, with added emphasis on home-care programmes in urban as well as rural and mountainous areas. Secondly, the introduction of new technology is making it possible to increase the range and quality of healthcare in terms of diagnosis, prevention and treatment, but this has to be paid for and staff need to be trained to use it. Thirdly, there are new and re-emerging threats to health, for example from communicable diseases. All of this is leading to continually increasing spending on health and indeed is posing major longer-term issues for the sustainability of health systems in some countries.

Another important issue to consider is the steady rise in EU citizens' expectations, where citizens demand better quality health service provision from their respective national health service providers and who often look abroad to avoid long waiting lists or for a better quality and/or cost-effective health service provision in another member states. For this reason, health personnel require training and added expertise to be able to adapt to the changes. To respond adequately to these challenges requires that health systems have efficient and effective work forces of the highest quality, as health services are becoming ever more labour intensive. Indeed, healthcare constitutes one of the most significant sectors of the EU economy, providing employment for one in ten of the EU workforce, and approximately 70% of the healthcare budgets are allocated to salaries and other charges related directly to employment of the health workforce.

An important phenomenon is that of tourism and health tourism across Europe and worldwide. Analysis demonstrates a proportionately high level of tourist inflows in the participating regions of Sanicademia. The growing phenomenon of patient mobility means that health personnel (doctors, nurses, health workers, social workers) need to update their professional skills and language skills to be able to communicate effectively with patients from other member states or from outside Europe.

Another health challenge that Sanicademia is trying to meet is to find solutions for the shortage of health professionals in its regions, mainly paediatricians and nurses. An integral part of the cross-border strategy of Sanicademia is to adapt its health personnel training programmes to face current and future European health challenges and tackle the rising numbers of health workers looking to work abroad. Continuous education, Masters courses, workshops, congresses, student exchange programmes and specialist training are an important part of the academy's strategy to bridge the gap

and to contain the brain drain of health professionals beyond their national borders, especially from new EU accession countries such as Slovenia and Bulgaria.

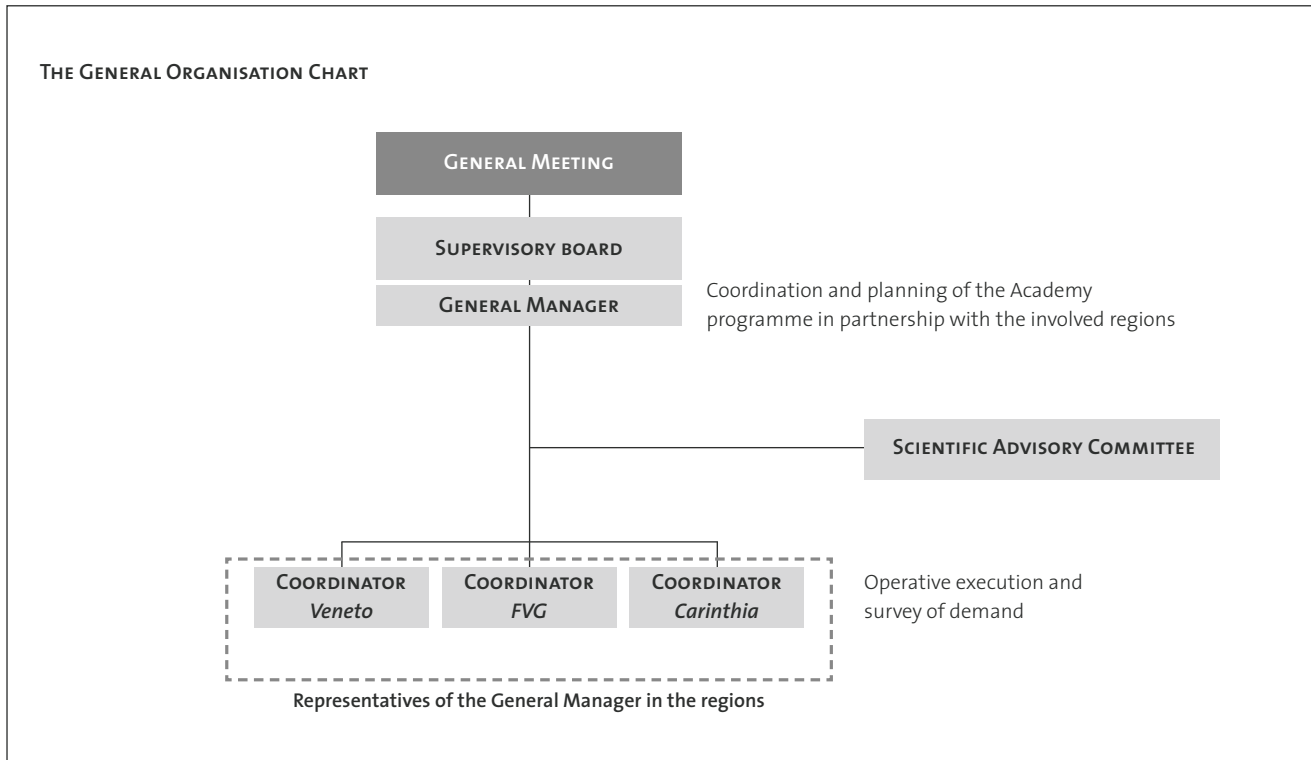
THE GENERAL ORGANISATION OF SANICADEMIA

The Annual General Meeting of Sanicademia is the main platform in which major decisions about organisation, scientific events and programming, curricula development, course design and decisions of an administrative nature are taken by the Sanicademia members, who represent their respective regions on an equal footing. Members directly elect the General Manager who is entrusted with representing the International Academy at an international and inter-regional level. Organisational management is carried out by the Supervisory Board which is also equally represented by members and experts of the three represented regions. A Scientific Advisory Committee is also available to the General Meeting members and to the

Abstract

ERFOLGREICHE GRENZÜBERGREIFENDE AUSBILDUNG UND TRAINING: SANICADEMIA – INTERNATIONALE TRAININGSAKADEMIE FÜR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Sanicademia oder, wie die offizielle Bezeichnung lautet, die Internationale Fortbildungsakademie für Gesundheitsberufe EWIV-GEIE, ist eine euroregionale Akademie für in Gesundheitsberufen tätige Menschen der italienischen Regionen Friaul-Julisch Venetien und Veneto und des österreichischen Bundeslandes Kärnten. Das Angebot der Akademie ist auf den Ausbildungsbedarf von Ärzten, Pflegemitarbeitern und generell des Gesundheitspersonals sowie auf andere Berufsprofile im Gesundheits- und Sozialwesen, wie zum Beispiel im Bereich der Gesundheits- und Krankenhausverwaltung, ausgerichtet. Von der Geburt der Idee für das Projekt im Jahr 2006 bis zum Start der ersten Kurse für Gesundheitspersonal dauerte es nur wenige Jahre. Die Akademie, in der die italienische Region Friaul-Julisch Venetien mit Unterstützung durch die Abteilung für internationale Beziehungen den Vorsitz führt, wird von einem Geschäftsführer – zurzeit vom Generaldirektor des Landeskrankenhauses Villach – geleitet. Sie hat ihren Sitz in Villach, verfügt aber über weitere Standorte in Triest und in Venedig. Der Grundgedanke der Sanicademia beruht auf den Grundsätzen der euregionalen Integration, die von der obersten politischen Ebene in den drei Regionen gefördert wird. Die Akademie profitiert im Rahmen des von Interreg IV A geförderten österreichisch-italienischen Projekts »Grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit in der Patientenversorgung« von mehreren Strukturfonds der EU. In der Anlaufphase wurden Kurse über medizinische Notversorgung angeboten und das EU-Projekt »Inform« zur Bekämpfung der Adipositas bei Kindern in Angriff genommen. Das Hauptziel der Akademie besteht in der Gewährleistung eines systematischen Austauschs von Informationen, Erfahrungen und Wissen unter den regionalen Gesundheitssystemen und der dauerhaften Bereitstellung eines grenzüberschreitenden »Campus« für die Ausbildung im Bereich der öffentlichen Gesundheit. Da von Ärzten oder Pflegemitarbeitern erworbene Fortbildungspunkte bisher nur in ihrem jeweiligen Heimatland anerkannt werden, hat Sanicademia dem Abbau dieser »administrativen Hürden« Priorität eingeräumt und erkundet Möglichkeiten für die Schaffung von länderübergreifend anerkannten Qualifikationen. Mehrere Gesundheitseinrichtungen in den nordöstlichen Regionen Italiens sowie in Kärnten und Slowenien entsenden ihre Mitarbeiter im Rahmen ihrer Qualifizierungsprogramme aktiv zur Fortbildung bei Sanicademia.



General Manager, especially when particularly sensitive issues and strategically important matters often of a scientific nature require in depth explanation or clarification.

Management of the International Academy has a top-down organisational structure, whereby the coordination and planning of the programme is managed by the General Manager, in agreement with the participating regions. The General Manager based in Villach is responsible for liaising with the coordinators of the three partner regions and for the coordination and planning of the Academy programme in partnership with the coordinators. The three coordinators of the Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and of the Austrian region of Carinthia gather detailed information on the needs and requirements of their respective regional representatives in the health sector (training, further education programmes, cross-border initiatives, student exchange programmes, conferences and congresses etc) and all information filters back to the General Manager and to the Supervisory Board during the Annual General Meeting where a general consensus is reached by all members. A constant flow of information ensures that all players have their say and ideas and suggestions are put forward for the benefit of all. The organisational structure is above all flexible, allowing room for the recruitment of new members, as well as the opening of new posts in other regions, and the nomination of a region not directly involved in the Academy to be elected as Regional Seat of the Academy for an interim period if necessary.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INITIATIVES

It is an ongoing objective of the International Academy for Health Professionals to improve the quality of patient care, develop common standards of quality, harmonise educational content and promote the mobility of nursing staff and physicians. Teaching programmes offered by Sanicademia are aimed at all health care professionals and decision makers working at various levels of the health care systems of the three regions. Post-graduate and further education programmes are offered to medical graduates and qualified health care professionals. More basic courses are aimed at less specialised health workers and degree level courses are being offered to qualified and registered nursing staff.

A number of joint multilingual events (seminars, congresses,

workshops) have been taking place within each of the partner regions with an emphasis on the promotion of interdisciplinary and intercultural thinking. Raising cultural awareness and improving language competence among health workers of bordering regions can only improve the quality of health care service offer and improve efficiency of patient care and accommodation in bordering regions. A number of joint projects have focused on the following: cross-border care in emergency and catastrophe cases, promoting the transnational mobility of patients and health care staff, developing transnational information systems and patient databases, multilingual scientific publications and public relations initiatives and participation in EU-funded projects. The long term goals will include a greater blending of contents and organisation of health care education within the future Upper Adriatic Euroregion coupled with the harmonisation of health care quality across the Euroregion in line with the highest international standards such as the Joint Commission International.

Programme Development for Post-Graduate Specialist Training Across Borders Sanicademia has set up a working group composed of various members from the scientific community within the participating regions that meet regularly to devise and develop post-graduate specialist training in medicine and health care management. The global aim is to develop common core health care syllabuses to be adopted by medical faculties in universities across the bordering regions. Student exchange initiatives and compulsory work placements in specialisation courses (for example, intensive care, psychiatry, health management, human resources for health management, quality management in health care) and most importantly, the mutual recognition of training content and standards across medical institutions in the regions are the core pillars which the philosophy of Sanicademia is based on.

FURTHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING COURSES

The first postgraduate training course to be launched by Sanicademia has been a *MSc-Programme in European Quality Management of Health Care Systems*. This course provides specialised training to experienced and qualified employees and experts in the health sector who want to gain qualifications to work at management level and involves the close cooperation between regional universities. The

course is divided into modules made up of 340 seminars lasting four semesters, covering a total of 1 500 hours. Opportunities are given to participants to take up one of 40 internships made available in any one of the partner regions. To bridge the gap in demand for qualified and experienced lymph therapy practitioners at university level, Sanicademia offers a *Specialised Training Programme for Lymph Therapy Practitioners* aimed at health professionals with experience in curative massage, physiotherapy and related fields. Sanicademia also offers a *Specialised Training Course for Nutritional Experts to Combat Obesity*. The course, composed of 6 modules covered in 8 full days spread across a 3-month period, is based on the latest interdisciplinary research into the epidemiology, incidence, aetiology, and risk factors underlying obesity. Training is aimed at GPs, hospital physicians, psychologists, psychotherapists, schoolteachers, dieticians, nutritional counsellors and sports and exercise consultants who are provided with know how and scientifically evaluated techniques of intervention to aid them in their work with adults, youths and children.

From September 2009, Sanicademia will be offering a *Master in Quality in the Health Sector*, in collaboration with the University of Udine and LKH Villach hospital, working closely with JCI. It will consist of 14 modules covered in 1 500 hours. Moreover, a course on *New European Models of Training for Social Management in Health Systems* was launched in Venice on 25th and 26th June 2009 aimed at young health professionals intent on working in the Euroregion in the future.

ORGANISATION OF CONVENTIONS, SEMINARS AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Training schemes, courses and seminars are tailored to specific professional profiles. More recently, there has been a focus on the development of training schemes in the nursing area and plans to promote residency for hospital physicians and other specific training programmes required for compulsory internships are also in the pipeline. Ongoing projects include the training and exchange of nursing, therapeutic and medical staff, which implies the development of training courses, training workshops, language courses, educational and professional practical training and staff exchange between the partner regions. A number of seminars and conventions on specialised areas of health care are being developed, often repeated annually or bi-annually. Below is a breakdown of what Sanicademia has to offer:

Seminars on hospital hygiene and hospital acquired infections (HAI): The target group for these special seminars on hospital hygiene are all health care professionals. The course provides them with the scientific know-how, practical information and tools necessary to protect themselves and their patients from preventable hospital infections (HAI). Concrete measures for preventing the expansion of infectious diseases, techniques of disinfection and hand hygiene, as well as hygiene procedures and guidelines form an integral part of the course content.

Seminars on patient safety: International organisations such as the WHO and JCI have acknowledged the importance of patient safety and this area of health has been established as a key priority on the European health agenda, both at the EU level and in individual member states. The Austrian Chamber of Physicians declared 2007 to be the year of patient safety. That year, Sanicademia seized the opportunity by adding patient safety to its teaching programme, developing seminars on patient safety for all health workers and drawing on the experiences of the regional hospital of Villach and the guidelines of the JCI. The aim is to promote greater alignment of patient safety initiatives in the participating regions with European and international developments.

International Convention on geriatrics and gerontology: Geriatrics and gerontology are specialist medical areas which are acquiring ever greater importance due to the increasing ageing of the population and the dramatic demographic changes underway. In May 2008, Sanicademia, in collaboration with the Austrian Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology, organised an international convention in Venice on this very theme. The convention gave participants the chance to carry out a more active role in the exchange of cross-border experiences from Italy, Slovenia, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Austria. The 2nd International Convention for Geriatrics and Gerontology will take place in Venice from April 29th – May 1st, 2010, and will be of an interdisciplinary nature, with interventions from over 40 EU experts.

The 18th Austrian Convention on Health and Nursing: »Nursing beyond borders – what can we learn from one another?« took place in Villach from June 17th–19th, 2009, placing an emphasis on the mobility of health care workers, primarily nurses, and the recognition of qualifications and professional experience across borders.

The 2nd International Convention on Quality Management in Healthcare is planned for October 19th–20th, 2009 in Trieste, with a focus on standards of quality for healthcare (Canadian Council, JCI) and on risk management, with particular reference to patient safety. Following the convention a 3-day period of internship will be organised in conjunction with JCI focusing on Quality Management.

The ENT-Convention will take place in Feltre (Belluno) in collaboration with Feltre Hospital on March 7th–8th, 2010, with an emphasis on the physiopathology, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of balance disorders in the elderly. The target group will be medical specialists for ENT, neurology, geriatrics, cardiology, first aid doctors, general practitioners and directors of nursing homes and hospitals.

A 2-day International Convention on Paediatrics will take place in 2011 in Villach. It will deal with the topics covered by the Austrian Society of Paediatrics and will be of an interdisciplinary nature.

SANICADEMIA AND E-HEALTH: IT SYSTEMS FOR CROSS-BORDER EXCHANGE OF CLINICAL AND MEDICAL DATA

Currently, there are no countries which actively exchange medical or clinical data, despite the introduction of the EHC in June 2004. Furthermore, different kinds of e-Cards for patients in the regions of Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Slovenia complicate efforts to cooperate effectively. There are also problems regarding the compatibility of e-Cards with any given version of the KIS-System (Kaspersky Internet Security) in place in those regions. The scope of Sanicademia's work in the area of e-Health is wide and far-reaching. Among its objectives, it intends to move towards the cross-border electronic use of e-Cards for the benefit of patients in the participating regions of the Austrian state of Carinthia, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Slovenia. Further actions towards clarifying technical and legal issues associated with the use of sensitive data held in e-Cards across national healthcare systems will need to be taken and proposals for use of IT across the Euroregions will have to be formulated with an emphasis on cross-border data exchange and innovation in telemedicine. Nonetheless, certain milestones have already been achieved: a pilot installation for the cross-border use of e-Cards in participating regions is already in place and an assimilation of various KIS-Systems is currently being fine-tuned. Legal issues regarding cross-border data exchange and use of telemedicine are being analysed and an ongoing debate on what constitutes the reasonable use of IT within the Euroregions, with particular emphasis on data exchange, and telemedicine is underway.

THE PARTICIPATION OF SANICADEMIA IN EU FUNDED PROJECTS**»IN FORM«: A CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD AND ADOLESCENT OBESITY**

Overweight and obesity are increasing at an alarming rate in Europe. Obesity is one of the most serious public health problems in Europe

and the increase in childhood obesity is particularly worrying. In view of this alarming situation, the European Project known as »In Form«: A campaign against child and adolescent obesity, was launched by Sanicademia in 2006 in Villach and supported by the EU Executive Agency for Health and Consumers. Twelve partners from Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Norway, Finland, UK, Sweden, Serbia, and Switzerland have been involved in the project led by Villach LKH Hospital. The aim of the 3-year project has been to make the public – children, young people and their parents alike – more aware of the psychological effects that eating disorders can have on overweight children and young people through effective social marketing initiatives. The proposal includes the creation of a common platform for the relevant professional groups and disciplines, as well as specific training programmes designed to promote the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience and develop »a comprehensive and integrated cross-border plan to combat child obesity«. The proceedings of the project will include an interdisciplinary handbook of standards and guidelines to help to deal with child and adolescent obesity and proposals for a learning methodology and an officially recognised reference manual to be adopted by professionals across the board, be they doctors, psychologists, nutritional experts, dieticians, or sports consultants.

CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Sanicademia is already into its third year of activity, having successfully brought together the wide range of experiences and know how of a host of health professionals from its participating regions. In the future Sanicademia envisages the increasing support of the EU in health programme planning and the harmonisation of further education and health professional training curricula and qualifications across borders. The global aim of Sanicademia is to improve the quality of health training at all professional levels in the health sector through the promotion of cross-border teaching programmes, student exchange initiatives, as well as the exchange of best practice in health at all levels across the regions. Patients in bordering regions will ultimately be able to benefit from a well-trained, culturally aware and multilingual health force always ready to adapt to new developments in their specific fields. In view of constant new developments in the quality of health care management and the increasing focus on e-Health programmes, patient care and the satisfaction of patient needs across borders will head the list of priorities for policy makers and top the agendas of health providing institutions across the board. ■

OFFICIAL SANICADEMIA WEBSITE: www.sanicademia.eu

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