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Young Turkish Family Physicians' Experience of the Vasco de Gama Movement

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The Vasco de Gama Movement (VdGM) is an association of European General Practice/Family Medicine Trainees and Specialists who are within five years of qualifying. VdGM is linked to WONCA Europe. One of the objectives is to facilitate exchange programmes between member countries. It was through the VdGM network that the Turkish Family Physicians arranged to attend an exchange programme and conference in Ireland. The purpose of this event was to increase knowledge and cooperation between European GP/FM trainees. With this aim, nine of us accepted an invitation by the Irish VdGM representative, Dr Darach O Ciardha, to attend this event from the 6th to the 12th of May.

Our group had nine delegates, second only to Holland, who had twelve delegates. We also met delegates from the UK, Spain, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Denmark and Ireland. On the first day we participated in a European Healthcare Workshop attended by all nine countries. We discussed our healthcare system, our training and our practices. On the second day we visited Irish GP's in their own surgeries, some of us in Dublin and a second group in Cork, Ireland's second biggest city. On the third day some of us did more Practice visits while the others attended a workshop on Communication skills between doctors and patients. Although Irish General Practitioners have comfortable and modern working environments, they are only equipped for the provision of Primary healthcare. What was interesting was the importance attached to doctor-patient communication and that the GP has a gate-keeper role in terms of controlling access to secondary and tertiary care. We were surprised to learn that primary care in Ireland was not free and GP's were charging patients for their services. On the other hand waiting times for specialist consultation, ie 2 yrs for a rheumatologist, and emergency services were very long. Therefore the importance of family medicine in Ireland was very obvious.

The Irish people, who have a Catholic tradition, treated us very kindly. They have a young and vibrant population. Our programme included attending the Irish Trainee Conference in Cork which was attended by delegates from all over Ireland. This was a great opportunity to work with them and share our experiences. We actively participated in the conference for the next two days. One of our delegates, who had attended the previous VdGM Conference, made a presentation and we discussed improvements in Turkish Healthcare. We also attended some presentations by academics in Family Medicine/General Practice.

We returned after enhancing our expectations and hopes for the future of Family Physicians in Europe and in Turkey. We are pleased to share our experiences and hopes with our young Turkish family physicians.