

Editorial

Charter on Medical Professionalism Where do we go from here?

Dr. Christopher Davidson (EFIM Secretary)

At the beginning of this new century the medical profession is at a crossroads. For the last 100 years we have seen steady growth in confidence between the general public and the medical profession based largely on advances in medical science and technology. But in the last decade this relationship between the profession and the public has been seriously eroded, both in Europe and in North America.

In this issue of the journal we publish a Physicians Charter on Medical Professionalism, the product of a joint venture between EFIM and the American Board of Internal Medicine/American College of Physicians (ABIM/ACP). This is the result of meetings between the two organisations over a two-year period. It builds on earlier work by the ABIM/ACP but it was the intention of the working group to give this a more international dimension. The group also received valuable advice from Silvia and Richard Cruess who have written extensively on this subject over the last five years [1].

The Charter sets out a number of commitments and principles which encompass many of the issues currently faced by the medical profession. It was obvious from our discussions that the emphasis differed from one country to another, but there was sufficient common ground to provide a valuable document which could be the focus for discussion and debate. Many of these issues form part of the traditional Hippocratic oath but modern medicine has thrown up many new concerns which are addressed in this Charter. Not least of these is the political dimension, which among other things, is concerned by the lack of medical care for sections of our population. This is a real issue for the uninsured in the U.S., but closer examination revealed that there are many groups within Europe which are disenfranchised by our health systems and receive inadequate help and care.

The Charter was developed in a strong spirit of co-

operation between our different countries. It is intended for wide dissemination and was jointly published by the *Lancet* [2] and the *Annals of Internal Medicine* [3] in February 2002 with editorial comment in both of these journals. Plans are already in place to publish it in translation in Dutch, French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish. At the Council meeting in Madrid in January, our President Jaime Merino urged all member societies of the Federation to give this document the widest publicity within their countries, not just within the sphere of internal medicine but across other branches of the medical profession and the general public. As a result, we hope that the Charter will strengthen the position of Internists within the medical community as a whole.

As experienced physicians, we must all be concerned about the current threats to the profession. But we must look to the future and to our young doctors in training. The Charter provides a real template for discussions within medical schools and in our residency training programmes. We hope to continue to develop this, in collaboration with ABIM/ACP, at our future Schools of Internal Medicine in Alicante.

Chris Davidson

Secretary, EFIM, and member of the Working Group.

References

- [1] Cruess RL, Cruess SR, Johnston SE. Professionalism: an ideal to be sustained. *Lancet* 2000;356:156.
- [2] Charter on medical professionalism. Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physicians' charter. *Lancet* 2002;359:520–2.
- [3] Charter on medical professionalism. Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physicians' charter. *Ann Int Med* 2002;136:243–6.