



EUROPEAN UNION OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

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UEMO 2001/093 Rev. 1

DUTCH NATIONAL REPORT

In this report we inform the UEMO on two major topics:

--GP strike for better wages and the retention of the Dutch General Practitioner

-- An alarmingly growing GP shortage

1.

Striking for a better income and working conditions for the present and future Dutch GP

On May, 2, 3 and 4 almost all Dutch GP's went on strike in protest against the rigid budgetkeeping in the Dutch government. The way it was organised was applauded by all. We did call it a strike for publicity reasons, but strictly spoken it was not. GP's had organised a kind of special locum service, not orchestrated by the National Association, but organised by the GP's in their own region. In doing so they took management of their own situation, in co-operation very often with hospital specialists, sometimes even working side by side in the emergency wards with the medical specialist, not used to GP work .

Although we were warned by many not to go that far as calling for a strike, afterward everybody spoke of a success, and of an unexpected proof of the unanimity of Dutch GP's. The press was not negative, and appeared to understand our actions and the motivations behind it. The strike received extensive television coverage. Because GP in many areas had organised playful actionscenes , such as doing surgery in a caravan in the square of a markettown, they got the lion's share of the camera's attention. Altogether the strike was a success.

We are however not striking for the sake of striking. The protest was against the consequent rigid no of the government to the long due improvement of the costallowance and the wages for GP's. . Since 1985 the structure of the costallowance has not been changed. Only the sum itself was regularly updated. .The wagestructure has not been updated since 1989. All this because the government has always said no to any ameliorisation or any suggestion in that direction. The sharp increase of the premiums for the disability insurance during the last three years fuelled the disquiet among GP's about their financial situation. The anxiety about the increasing GP shortage did the rest. Because government this year despite all prosperity in our society kept saying no to our demands the Dutch national GP Association has called her members up for the three day strike.

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Striking and in the meantime threatening to terminate the contracts with the sick funds as of July 1, 2001 paid of. Since early May the cost allowance on a national scale has been raised with 250 million guilders or roughly 110 million Euro. Per GP that means ca. 41.000 Dutch guilders (ca 18.000 EURO) A regional components shall be negotiated in the region. The sick funds will bear the costs of the large-scale locum services as of July 1, 2001. The discussions for better wages will start after the summer holidays. We do hope that a second round of strikes will not necessary.

All this is not endeavoured for the present GP, but more importantly for young GP's and the future GP's. When working conditions will not be improved remarkably, including the financial aspects, it will be very difficult to keep attracting enough young doctors to our GP workforce in the competition with other medical training facilities. The number of GP's in training has to be doubled just to keep abreast of the current walkout because of pension age, illness, burn out or early retirement.

B.

An alarmingly growing GP shortage

In a span of about ten years the Dutch GP surplus has turned in a growing shortage. Because of the lengthening of the specific training to two years about fifteen years ago a large number of young GP's settled then and after that a growing reservoir of young GP's arose seeking their own practice. We got so used to this large reservoir that almost everybody failed to notice about 7 years ago the rapid emptying of that reservoir. This was amongst others due to a growing feminisation of the work force not wishing anymore to work full time, a trend taken over by younger male GPs. Next to that a growing number of GPs dropped out because off burnout and because of good pension schemes. Government however paying all the costs of the specific training period including the wages of the GP's in training, refused to acknowledge the problem. At long last also because we had Members of the Dutch Parliament as allies we have succeeded convincing our government to enlarge the influx of young GP's. Offcourse it will take many years to come abreast with the need for GP's.

At present we now have about 100 "empty" GP practices. This number is growing rapidly. Everybody is washing his hands, but when nobody does do anything we foresee a disaster. Nevertheless, everybody is looking our way and does expect us to take initiatives. We are contemplating this.

Utrecht, June 14, 2001