

History and Milestones

1995 – 2003 Origins of the network: the “Durban Declaration”

London, October 1995. The newly appointed professor in primary health care (PHC) of Cape Town University, Professor Dumo Baqwa, met with professor Jan De Maeseneer, Chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Primary Health Care of Ghent University. During this meeting it became clear that there was a strong movement in South Africa towards the development of PHC, with the ‘family physician’ as the medical discipline. Professor Baqwa invited Professor De Maeseneer to South Africa for a study visit where contacts with the most important stakeholders in the development of family medicine (FM) were scheduled.

In light of the positive experience of interuniversity cooperation between South Africa and Flanders (Belgium), the possibility for cooperation between the Departments of Family Medicine of the eight medical faculties in South Africa and the Department of Ghent University was explored. Financed by the Minister of Education of the Flemish Community, a workshop took place on “*Training in Family Medicine and Primary Health Care in South Africa and Flanders*” in September 1997 in Durban.

At the end of the workshop, the “*Durban Declaration*” was adopted, stating that the 8 South African departments responsible for FM were to form a consortium, called FAMEC (Family Medicine Education Consortium), and would work together on common objectives by:

- ✓ Forging a network for communication and consultation;
- ✓ Adopting common vision and concerted action e.g. on vocational training;
- ✓ Developing methods to represent the perspectives of the consortium;
- ✓ Sharing and exchanging knowledge and expertise;
- ✓ Optimising and potentiating one another by collective use of resources in order to serve all districts in the country;
- ✓ Contributing to the management of the change, the basic curriculum and vocational training.

Between 1995 and 2004 FAMEC regularly organised interuniversity meetings between all departments of Family Medicine. Major challenges addressed by the consortium were the elaboration of a ‘core-curriculum’ and the development of appropriate assessment-systems.

2003 - VLIR-UOS support



From 2003 onwards, the cooperation was financed with a grant from the Flemish Interuniversity Development Cooperation (VLIR-UOS), in the framework of a project on the *“Optimisation of the vocational medical training in Family Medicine & Primary Health Care in South Africa: a contribution to the realisation of health for all”*. Yearly training workshops were organised and two groups of South African teachers in FM visited the Flemish departments in order to exchange experiences on training of family physicians. The synergy in strategic and educational developments in the North and the South was most striking. Courses were developed in an electronic environment, training was organised in PHC-centres and district hospitals with direct supervision of the trainees. In all South African provinces training complexes (consisting of PHC-centres with related clinics and district health hospitals) were developed.

2005 - Expansion of the network outside South Africa



Belgium
partner in development

The positive South African experience inspired the continuation in the framework of a new VLIR-UOS project: *“Development of training in Family Medicine/Primary Health Care in Southern and Eastern Africa: a contribution to the realisation of quality and equitable healthcare through a South-South Network”*.

The first contacts outside South Africa were established and the project included FM departments from Tanzania, Kenya, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. The strategy of South-South-North cooperation was developed as it was clear that, as far as the content of the training programmes were concerned, all the expertise was located in the South.

The project also focused on strategies for information sharing and on translating results into an appropriate educational context. Through the South-South cooperation, the impact of the developmental progress improved considerably, as models developed in one site could be implemented in other places.

2007 - Consolidation of PRIMAFAMED network, the African Journal for PHC and FM

In 2007, a successful application was made in the framework of the ACP-EU cooperation programme on higher education (Edulink). The project was named: *“PrimaFamed Network:*

Primary Care and Family Medicine Network". The project aimed to establish an institutional network between beginning and established departments or units of FM and PHC in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The geographical scale increased considerably: the eight departments of Family Medicine in South Africa were associates, and also departments from universities in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, DRC, Rwanda, Sudan, Ghana and Nigeria joined the network. In the different countries training complexes were established with financial support from the project. There were opportunities for staff-mobility whereby departments could invite teachers from other Southern partners or associates to enhance the local training capacity.

Later on, each of the South African FM departments twinned with a another African region to train family physicians, even if in that region there was no medical faculty, or even no university, yet. The criteria for "eligibility" for the departments was that at least there was an institutional intent to start with a program in Family Medicine training, at one of the four developmental stages as described in an analysis done in 2010:

- level 1: structural implementation of the training program in the department is in preparation;
- level 2: department/unit of family medicine exists or is part of other departments (Community Medicine), training complexes are under development, family medicine is part of undergraduate training;
- level 3: department/unit of family medicine exist, training complexes are in place, curriculum is written, post-graduate training has started;
- level 4: department/unit of family medicine exists, training complexes are in place; curriculum is written. Post graduate training has started; the ministry of health has excepted family medicine as specialization and graduated family physicians are part of the health-care system.

The article ["Medicine training in Sub-Saharan Africa: South-South cooperation in the Primafamed project a strategy for development"](#) describes the evolution of 10 Primafamed-network members in the period 2008-2010. At the end of the period these departments were rated at least one level higher than where they started in 2008.

Another major achievement was the launch of the *"African Journal for Primary Health Care and Family Medicine"* (www.phcfm.org). This journal aims to document the development of the discipline of Family Medicine and Primary Health Care in Africa. The journal started with seed-money from VLIRUOS and stimulates African authors to publish their first articles and to document important aspects of epidemiology of PHC, PHC processes, implementation of Evidence Based Medicine in the African context, etc.

Cooperation was further facilitated through a twinning project, again funded by VLIR-UOS: *"Strengthening developmental capacity for Family Medicine training in Africa: the South African Family Medicine Twinning project"*.

The project aimed at developing a strategy to stop the internal brain-drain on the African continent by establishing training complexes in the countries of origin, and by stimulating departments of FM to develop. The intention was that family physicians would be more likely to stay in their country of origin if they were also trained there.

2008 -2020 Primafamed meetings and activities

For the exchange of knowledge and experiences, several workshops were organised since 2008. Although the context in the different countries is quite different, similar strategies can be used, with an emphasis on social accountability and practice-based learning, in the context of training complexes.

Membership and participation continued to increase with 40 institutions and 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Regular meetings were funded by EuropeAid as visibility for a project *“Strengthening primary health care through family physicians and primary care doctors, South Africa”* through Stellenbosch University.

Primafamed also collaborated with the Royal College of General Practitioners and Stellenbosch University in the FAM-Leap project to train clinical trainers. Courses were held in South Africa, Malawi and Kenya.

Primafamed also developed a focus on collaborative primary care research and research capacity building. In 2018-2019 Primafamed was a founding member of a new global Primary Health Care Research Consortium.

In 2019 Primafamed became the official academic wing of Wonca Africa responsible for education, training and research.