



# Action Plan of the Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Board

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The European Board of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (PRM) is the Body of the Specialist Section of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine of the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (Union of European Medical Specialists, UEMS) for addressing scientific and training interests. The 2008 Common rules of procedure for the Board of PRM state on the first page of its statutes: "The Board is interested in defining in clear terms 'European Standards', *i.e.* the basic elements for a European training programme, the opportunities and conditions for training rotation, attachments, exchanges and the average level of required knowledge and technical competence. More specifically, the aims of the Board are to harmonize the training in the European Union so as to ensure optimal rehabilitative care for patients in the European Union countries".<sup>1</sup> This statute was approved unanimously by the members of the Specialist Section of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (at a General Assembly in Paris in April 1991, acting as the Constitutional Assembly of the Board of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine), and accepted unanimously in the same year by the General Assembly of the UEMS in Brussels.

In recent years, the main activities of the Board<sup>1</sup> have been as follows:

- harmonization of PRM training in Europe;

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- certification of PRM specialists (by examination and equivalence);
- certification of PRM trainers;
- certification/recertification of PRM training sites;
- continuing medical education and recertification of PRM specialists;
- accreditation of European Congresses and Teaching Programmes.

Regarding the certification procedures of PRM doctors, the Board Certification is a quality mark, because of its efforts in attaining the European standards of competence in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine. European Board membership is considered a valuable asset when included in a curriculum vitae for scientific and professional purposes. Above all, these procedures are the basis for a European network for intellectual exchanges and fellowship and for the clarification of the structure and activities of PRM for both public authorities and the general public.

The Board agrees—among others—on the following points:

- 1) European Board Examinations are complementary to National Examinations where they exist;

2) countries which do not have their own examinations are encouraged to consider using the appropriate European Board Examinations;

3) candidates for the European Board Examination should either be trainees in the final year of training or be certified PRM specialists in a UEMS member country;

4) individuals who become European Board Certified may call themselves "Fellow of the European Board of PRM" (FEBPRM). After 10 years of Board Certification and when they are European Board Recertified may call themselves "Senior Fellow of the European Board of PRM" (SFEBPRM).

The European Board of PRM is implementing a set of benefits for PRM Board Certified Specialists as well as for Board registered trainees:

- free or low cost teaching programmes (such as in the European School of Marseille, and in the School of Syracuse);

- reduced registration fees for European and National Congresses;

- reduced subscription rates for medical journals (*e.g.* Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine, the official journal of the European Board of PRM), etc.;

- eligibility for recognition as a PRM trainer. Then, if a PRM trainer is a Department-head, she/he is eligible to apply the department accreditation as a Board-certified European training centre;

- new opportunities, including e-learning technologies, in order to drive education and training programmes in PRM into new frontiers of knowledge when combined with accelerating translational research.

About this last point, a great deal of educational work has been done by the Board since that period.<sup>2</sup> However, currently only a few medical students receive information on disabilities during their undergraduate training; access to the advances in the field of PRM is difficult and only a few PRM trainees are involved in evidence-based medicine and research.

To address these issues, the Board has drafted an action plan for initial education in PRM called the World Action Plan for Initial Education in PRM (WAPIE). The aim of this plan is to improve the teaching on disabilities in the undergraduate programmes of medical schools, spreading knowledge during the training programme in PRM and involving PRM trainees in research.<sup>3</sup>

### *Undergraduate teaching programmes*

There are no undergraduate teaching programmes on disabilities in the European countries. One of the first aims of the action plan is to gather information on what kind of education is provided in the different countries of the European Union (EU). A survey is being conducted among the delegates of each EU country. The first results have been presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> European Congress of PRM in Bruges, June 3-6, 2008,<sup>4</sup> and during the meeting of the French National Society of PRM – SOFMER in Mulhouse (October 23-25, 2008). Difficulties may come from the fact that undergraduate teaching programmes can vary from one university to another within a given country.

However, an important action of the PRM Section and Board has been the vote of a motion at UEMS level which states that "Teaching of disability issues should be strongly suggested for the curriculum of medical education". In some countries documents dedicated to undergraduate medical students already exist such as the document of the French Association of University Professors (COFEMER) which can be obtained with free access at its website.<sup>5</sup> Permission for the translation of this document into different European languages has been given to our Board.

### *Spreading knowledge*

The goal informing PRM trainees on advances in PRM, guidelines and evidence-based medicine can be achieved by several means. One is to organize specific educational sessions dedicated to PRM trainees during European (national and international) PRM congresses. This was the case during the 16<sup>th</sup> European Congress of PRM in Bruges, where the PRM Board and Section organized several educational sessions ("Spasticity", "Education and training in Europe", "European School Marseille", "PRM field of competence", and "Quality of care: a European accreditation system"). Special workshops were organized for trainees (*e.g.* musculoskeletal, ultrasonography, botulinum toxin injections in spasticity, infiltration techniques) and the Trans-European Scientific Contest took place. Likewise, during the SOFMER meeting held in Mulhouse a specific free session on cerebral palsy in English has been prepared for PRM trainees. Other European countries are implementing or planning to implement similar initiatives for PRM trainees, in collaboration with our Board. Trainees'

participation in these sessions should be favoured by free access or reduced fees (as in Bruges and Mulhouse).

Spreading knowledge can also be facilitated through the use of international and national scientific journals in the field of PRM. A list of leading PRM journals – judged from a European point of view – has recently been published<sup>6</sup> by members of an *ad hoc* Committee of the European Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ESPRM). Some European journals such as the “European Journal of PRM”, the “Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine”, the “Annales de Réadaptation et de Médecine Physique” – in agreement with the most prominent PRM European bodies, *e.g.* UEMS PRM Section and Board, ESPRM,<sup>7</sup> the European Academy of Rehabilitation Medicine (EARM)<sup>8</sup> – have accepted to publish in the near future educational papers with online open access. Moreover, in line with these European and WAPIE aims<sup>6</sup> the Chief-Editors of important PRM international journals have recently proposed to take advantage of international meetings to discuss with authors and editors ways in which the different journal policies can be harmonized, and to create a dedicated “council” of editors of rehabilitation journals to address many common educational and editorial issues.<sup>9</sup>

E-learning will obviously be a further efficient way of providing knowledge to PRM trainees. However “quality control” is necessary. This task has recently been undertaken by F. Franchignoni, who prepared for the Board a review of websites offering open access valuable information in the field of PRM, that will soon be available on the website of the UEMS PRM Section and Board.<sup>1</sup> The main sources of this material were websites such as eMedicine that contains a series of open access articles regarding PRM<sup>10</sup> – and the Bookshelf of the NCBI (US National Center for Biotechnology Information, which includes the National Library of Medicine, PubMed, etc.)<sup>11</sup> – that includes among others the “Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Board Review”. Other notable books have been added, such as for example “Assessment in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation”,<sup>12</sup> published in 2004 by the Foundation “Salvatore Maugeri” under the auspices of the EARM, and of which hundreds of copies have been distributed free around the world. In the future, educational documents will be prepared by members of the Section and Board and put on the PRM Section and Board website.<sup>1</sup> Among PRM educational websites, the COFEMER offers documents

available in French (agreement has been given for the translation into English).

Teaching programmes are another means of spreading knowledge to trainees. Since 2000, under the auspices of the UEMS PRM Section and Board, the European School Marseille on Motor Disabilities has provided two-week teaching programmes to more than 500 European trainees and other trainees coming from North and South America and the Mediterranean. In addition, since 2005 a teaching programme free for trainees has been organised also in Syracuse the Euro-Mediterranean Rehabilitation Summer School – under the auspices of the Mediterranean Forum of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine,<sup>13</sup> the ESPRM and the International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM). In the future, such programmes should be further promoted and spread, with the support of WAPIE.

### Research

To involve PRM trainees in research is the third goal of WAPIE. The need to increase research activities in PRM implies that more trainees should get involved in research, both clinical and basic research. Involvement in research goes hand in hand with learning about evidence-based medicine, critical reading, and also about oral and written scientific communication. Such fields should be developed in each University. In the teaching programme “European School of Marseille on Motor Disabilities” specific sessions on scientific communication, on evidence-based medicine and critical reading are organised.

To conclude, there is a strong need to provide medical students with more information on disabilities during their undergraduate training, to give PRM trainees access to the advances in the field of PRM and to involve PRM trainees in the field of research. The aim of the “WAPIE” action plan is to address these issues and further develop the teaching programmes. The plan is already underway and the UEMS PRM Section and Board are in close cooperation with the ISPRM<sup>14, 15</sup> and the Association of Academic Physiatrists<sup>16</sup> in supporting such educational activities.

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