

*Prof Amanda Howe was elected as WONCA President-Elect in Prague in June 2013. She became the first woman to be WONCA President in 2016.*

### **Background**

Amanda Howe is a practising family doctor, an academic professor, and a national and international leader in family medicine. Since 2001, she has been Professor of Primary Care at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, U.K., where she was part of the founding team for the Norwich Medical School. During her career, she has held multiple roles in undergraduate, postgraduate, and faculty education, including being Course Director for the UEA medical programme during its early years of development and accreditation by the General Medical Council. The course sends students to general practice from week 1 of year 1 till graduation!

Amanda has particular expertise in effective models and impacts of involving family medicine in community based medical education; in the teaching and learning of professionalism and patient safety; and in resilience and doctors' wellbeing. She also has clinical research interests in primary care mental health, the contribution of patients to health care and health systems; and in early interventions for health risk factors. Her home member organization is the Royal College of General Practitioners, where she was an Officer from 2009 – 2015, serving first as Honorary Secretary and then Vice Chair of Council, having, previously chaired both the RCGP Research Committee and the U.K. Society for Academic Primary Care.

She is still very much involved in caring for patients, working one day a week at the Bowthorpe Health Centre in Norwich – and she remains “in awe” of how resilient patients can be. “I wanted to be a GP when I was a medical student, despite influences from tutors to do otherwise”, says Professor Howe. “It’s a privilege to work with people faced by adversity and illness. People are often very courageous and extremely strong, they really do inspire me, and I’m fascinated by the role that the primary care consultation can play in helping patients make sense of their lives, and overcome physical and mental adversity.”

### **WONCA involvement**

Amanda has been deeply involved with WONCA since 2000, when she facilitated a workshop for their Working Party on Women and Family Medicine. She chaired that group from 2007-2009, and hosted an international meeting for WONCA at UEA in 2009. She has chaired the Organizational Equity Committee, as President Elect has supported WONCA at WHO meetings, and has taught as a visiting academic in Malaysia, Hong Kong and Thailand as well as in Australia and New Zealand.

### **Presidential priorities**

Her priorities as President include continuing to champion and explore how family doctors, and WONCA as an organization, can impact on equity; in particular addressing issues around gender, the needs of vulnerable and displaced people, and the challenges of poverty and underresourced health systems. She wants to ensure WONCA continues to be a ‘thought leader’ through its policy debates and position statements, which members use to develop their thinking and impacts on their own settings. She wants to encourage us all to get more members involved with WONCA and to ensure that all family doctors know about us and

our work. And she wants to ensure that we look after ourselves, address areas of stress, and are resilient in the face of the challenging work we do and demands it places on us. As an educationalist and academic, she is also keen to support the role of family doctors as teachers and researchers. Her commitment as a founder member of a new medical school in U.K. reflects her abiding belief that it is only in community settings that students can really understand how illnesses affect people, and what makes health care effective. And she is convinced that the discipline of family medicine needs to strengthen its scholarship. “As an academic you learn to structure your thinking to find out what is already known and what changes, if any, need to be made. Family doctors are out there really trying to do the best they can, often in extremely difficult situations, and WONCA is here to help to strengthen the development and the quality of practice.”

Another area Amanda is passionate about is that of promoting leadership within primary care with a view to ensuring the profession has enough leaders for the future. “Every doctor needs to be an effective leader at various times in their career but I’m concerned that sometimes family doctors just don’t feel they have the time or the confidence to be leaders” she says. “We really need to turn that attitude around to ensure the full impact of the profession. Also, sometimes women in particular do not have enough confidence in their ability to become leaders: they need to be supported to take on responsibilities where they can build up leadership skills to become leaders of teams, communities, and the profession”. As President, she will continue to be committed to the development of leadership through the Young Doctors’ Movements, and all other branches of WONCA.

Finally, Amanda says “I am enormously proud to be President of WONCA, but I am even more proud of the work that is done day after day by family doctors worldwide. Let’s make that visible – measure it, write it up, show the world that this matters to patients’. She wishes all family doctors well, and hopes to meet many of you in the 2016-2018 biennium.