Chapter 2

Paving the road for a European postgraduate training curriculum

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Abstract

The ‘Project for Achieving Consensus in Training’ has been initiated by the European Board & College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology to harmonise training in Obstetrics and Gynaecology throughout Europe. In this project called the EBCOG-PACT, a state of the art pan-European training curriculum will be developed.

Implementation of a pan-European curriculum will enhance harmonisation of both quality standards of women’s healthcare practice and standards of postgraduate training. Secondly, it will assure equal quality of training of gynaecologists, promoting mobility throughout Europe. Thirdly, it will enhance cooperation and exchange of best practices between medical specialists and hospitals within Europe.

The project is expecting to deliver (1) a description of the core and electives of the curriculum based on previously defined standards of care, (2) a societally responsive competency framework based on input from societal stakeholders and (3) strategies for education and assessment based on the current literature. Also, the project focuses on implementation and sustainability of the curriculum by delivering (4) a SWOT-analysis for the implementation based on insights into transcultural differences, (5) recommendations for implementation, change management and sustainability based on the SWOT analysis, and (6) a handbook for other specialties initiating European curriculum development.

The development and the implementation of this modern pan-European curriculum in Obstetrics and Gynaecology aim to serve as an example for the harmonisation of postgraduate training in Europe.
Background

Aiming at minimising inequalities and harmonising optimal healthcare in Europe, the European Board & College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (EBCOG) published ‘Standards of Care for Maternity and Gynaecological services’ in 2014, which gives a description of evidence-based medicine for all subjects in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (OBGYN).\(^1,\)\(^2\) In addition to providing these practice standards, EBCOG recognised there is a need for training standards as well. There are three main reasons why the development and implementation of OBGYN training standards, incorporated in a pan-European curriculum, would be beneficial for women’s healthcare in Europe.

A pan-European curriculum might enhance the implementation of the determined standards of care. Implementation of these standards will give insight in practice variation and quality of practices around Europe. By incorporating this in training, differences in practice in education and treatment can be reduced. Harmonisation of training therefore aims to improve the quality of women’s healthcare equally around Europe.

Secondly, it will provide assurance of the quality of training to trainees, gynaecologists and hospitals across Europe. Since doctors are increasingly moving around Europe, they need to have a strong professional position when doing so.\(^3,\)\(^4\) European legislation does allow free movement of doctors, but does not set a standard for professional competence.\(^5\) Assurance of equal quality of training might promote free movement of gynaecologists throughout Europe. It will also give hospitals the assurance that the mobile doctors they employ have the professional competence that is required.

Thirdly, it seems obvious that it will further enhance cooperation and exchange of best practices between medical specialists and hospitals within Europe. Not only doctors are moving around Europe, patients are increasingly willing to travel to receive the treatment they require. Patients need high quality care, provided by doctors who understand this mobility and have knowledge and experience beyond the boundaries of their country of residence. This asks for clear communication and well-grounded cooperation between hospitals and medical specialists in Europe.

The requirements for modernisation of training in OBGYN in Europe have been explored previously by Scheele et al.\(^6\) Presently, EBCOG does already operate in Europe with an accreditation system for training centres in OBGYN, has produced training logbooks with a strong focus on procedures, and developed a ‘Training the Trainers’ programme.\(^7\) However, there is a need for modernisation. In concordance with the innovations in the field of postgraduate medical training, it is essential that societal demands are met in competency-based learning. This means that training should rely on the development of all competencies that are relevant for the European gynaecologist (e.g. medical expert, communicator, scholar). There is a need for development of medical leadership in postgraduate trainees, to prepare for their future position in health systems innovation, for example to stimulate patient-centred care.\(^6\) Training should prepare for systems-based practice, enabling trainees to work in teams in complex organisations.\(^8\)

With the initiation of a project called the EBCOG-PACT (European Board & College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology – Project for Achieving Consensus in Training), the necessary step in modernisation and harmonisation of postgraduate training will be taken; the development and implementation of a state of the art pan-European curriculum in OBGYN. The project has received financial support from the European Commission (Erasmusplus).
The project

The aims of the project will be realised by a partnership representing all European gynaecologists, led by the Dutch members of the EBCOG council. Belgian, Czech, Danish and Italian members of the EBCOG council have joined the partnership (see figure 1). They have formed action committees consisting of gynaecologists, trainees, educationalists and change managers. Societal stakeholders (nurses, midwives, hospital board members and patient representatives) are involved in the partnership to represent medical as well as societal interests in the curriculum. The Project Board consists of three prominent EBCOG executive committee members as well as the current president of ENTOG and aims to monitor the execution and outcomes of the project.

Through different developmental strategies, the partners will determine consensus about the content, structure and format of the curriculum. This is of the utmost importance to create a pan-European curriculum that could be implemented in every European country. Gynaecologists and trainees representing all European countries will have the possibility of contributing to the project.

Launched in September 2015, the project has a span of three years. During this time, all components of the curriculum will be developed and the implementation of the curriculum will be initiated.

Figure 1: Organisation structure of EBCOG-PACT
Expected results

We aim to write a syllabus describing a commonly shared core curriculum and elective modules as the content of the curriculum. This provides a common basis of training, while respecting diversity in areas of interest (see figure 2). A Delphi (consensus) procedure will be conducted to determine the subjects of the core curriculum and elective modules. Experts from all European countries are asked to give judgments on OBGYN subjects in a survey.\(^9\)\(^{12}\)

![Figure 2: Possible training pathway of European curriculum in Obstetrics & Gynaecology.](image)

- Duration of the core depends on content and will be decided based upon consensus.
- Duration of electives may vary from 6-24 months and is to be determined by consensus. EBCOG recommends a minimum of 5 years for the total training period.

A competency framework will be developed and incorporated in the curriculum. Nurses, midwives, hospital board members, patient representatives, gynaecologists and trainees will generate a description of the competencies that a European gynaecologist should acquire. This framework might potentially be an aggregation of established frameworks, conforming OBGYN practice.\(^13\) Again, consensus methods will be used to develop a suitable competency framework for this curriculum.
The curriculum will also include an educational strategy. The subjects and end terms of training will be described to ensure workplace-based learning. Multiple modern methods of training and assessment, including the optimal use of simulation and e-learning, will be incorporated to support a system that fosters progressive independent practice to the trainees. Formats for faculty development (Training the Trainers) will be delivered and quality assurance for the training sites will be clearly described.

Prior to the actual implementation of the curriculum, an analysis on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) will be conducted. This will provide insight into how easily the curriculum could be implemented in the different European countries. It will report on practice variation in training per country, but will also describe a more general view on the factors that might either stimulate or impede the implementation of the new curriculum.

Recommendations will be made for state of the art change management, with the intention to ensure sustainability of the curriculum. Eventually, a handbook describing the methodology used in this project will be designed to guide other medical specialties to design and implement a curriculum on a European scale. Conferences will be organised to disseminate the new curriculum.

Besides the development of the curriculum itself, we also expect that this project will be a source of evidence in researching transcultural training. It is likely that differences in training between the European countries will be exposed and better understood. We aim to describe these differences to serve as a learning experience for transcultural training in postgraduate medical education in Europe.

**Conclusion**

EBCOG has taken the lead in modernising postgraduate training in OBGYN by developing a state of the art pan-European training curriculum, bringing together the best of inputs from trainees and gynaecologists, societal stakeholders, educationalists and change managers specialised in medical education.
References