

LETTERS—CONCISE RESEARCH REPORTS

Longitudinal Continuity

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It is with great interest that we have read the article by Ford and colleagues about SCOPE, an innovative longitudinal curriculum to increase students' interest in primary care (PC) careers, and its promising outcomes to date. The problem of insufficient numbers of graduates choosing primary care and particularly family medicine careers is widespread in Europe as well, including in Germany.¹ Consequently, there is a growing importance to include primary care within undergraduate education and several German medical schools have started initiatives to attract more students to the field.¹

In 2016, the extra-curricular longitudinal teaching project "Leipziger Kompetenzpfad Allgemeinmedizin" (LeiKA, Leipzig Competency Pathway for General Practice) started at the University of Leipzig, offering 30 slots per year for interested first-year medical students (average class size, 320). The LeiKA program was developed based on international evidence on factors influencing PC career choice as described by Ford et al. and based on our own research,² and shares goals and many characteristics with SCOPE. Similar to SCOPE, LeiKA starts in year one (of six). Participants are assigned to personal mentors who are experienced family practitioners and supervise the students during regular full-day visits in their community-based practice (mentoring, clinical component). Hosted within the Department of General Practice, LeiKA students attend two workshops per year to acquire primary care skills and competencies (didactic component).

We would like to highlight one additional aspect: To fight the erosion of PC commitment during undergraduate education mentioned by Ford et al., LeiKA has a "social component" consisting of regular informal social events to stimulate networking and mutual support. Several studies have underlined the influence of peers on career considerations, both supportive and unsettling,^{3,4} and there are indications that creating a sense of community counterbalances negative comments and decreases feelings of isolation for students contemplating careers in family practice.⁵

Currently LeiKA has 52 participants (24 first-year students, 28 second-year students). According to preliminary analyses of our six-monthly evaluation, using grades from 1 ("very good") to 6 ("unsatisfactory") students valued the social activities (1.9 ± 0.9 ; $N = 91$) as much as the content of the workshops (1.7 ± 0.8 ; $N = 92$) and the clinical visits (1.9 ± 1.2 ; $N = 89$). Among 141 statements responding to the open question "What did you like about the past LeiKA semester?" 31 (22.0%) explicitly addressed the social component.

We are very interested in SCOPE's progress and wish Ford and colleagues every success.

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Compliance with ethical standards:

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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