

The Changing Practice of Clinical Research

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Each clinician performs an individual “clinical research act” when he or she treats a patient. Traditionally the physicians were introduced into the art of healing through individual coaching by outstanding medical practitioners who handed down their great experience during the practical training of their pupils. The development of new therapies was part of the daily medical practice and was based primarily on the experience obtained by a smaller group of scholars; the circulation of their findings was limited to a relatively small cultural circle. With the advent of printing, multimedia communication methods, Internet, etc. the distribution of knowledge rapidly broadened to its contemporary global extension. Parallel, the scientific validity of the information provided became more precisely scrutinized by the medical profession. The individual small-scale collection of experience was replaced by well-controlled clinical trials performed on many thousand patients with the participation of hundreds of specialists working together internationally. This global experience forms collectively the medical evidence on which both the treatment decision concerning the individual patients and health care politics are based. It became therefore very important to train physicians during their university curriculum and thereafter in the art of performing clinical trials and applying the results of the global experience within the local cultural and socioeconomic environment. In this respect, for example, the aim of the Vienna School of Clinical Research is to provide training on this special field to physicians who received their primary education in different countries. Bringing together young fellows from many countries and many medical specialties provides a unique opportunity for exchanging experience, for understanding differences in health care practices and priorities in different countries, and for developing a common clinical research approach to solve medical problems.