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# Congratulations to the Department of Family Medicine of NWSMU named after I.I. Mechnikov for 25 years anniversary. Letter to the editorial board

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The letter briefly describes cooperation of the St. Petersburg Medical Academy of Postgraduate Studies and Royal college of general practitioners (Great Britain) with active participation of the author, aimed at improving the training of general practitioners in Russia and the contribution of the Department of Family Medicine of St. Petersburg Medical Academy of Postgraduate Studies (now – North-Western State Medical University named after I.I. Mechnikov) in the implementation of joint international projects.

**Keywords:** family medicine department; training; publishing; international projects.

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## Поздравления в адрес кафедры семейной медицины СЗГМУ им. И.И. Мечникова с 25-летним юбилеем. Письмо в редакцию

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В письме кратко описаны сотрудничество Санкт-Петербургской медицинской академии последипломного образования с Королевским колледжем врачей общей практики (Великобритания), осуществлявшееся при активном участии автора, направленное на совершенствование подготовки врачей общей практики в России, и вклад кафедры семейной медицины СПбМАПО, в дальнейшем СЗГМУ им. И.И. Мечникова, в реализацию совместных международных проектов.

**Ключевые слова:** кафедра семейной медицины; обучение; издательская деятельность; международные проекты.

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Congratulations to the Department of Family Medicine on its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. I feel I am one of its oldest friends, having known it from three years before its birth! My first visit to Russia was in 1992, sent by the UK Royal College of General Practitioners to form a partnership with the Medical Academy of Saint Petersburg. The program of my visit was organized by three departments, which at that time were engaged in training general practitioners: Department of Therapy No. 1, headed by Professor A.A. Krylov, Department of General Practice, headed by Professor Yu.M. Gubachev and the Department of Pediatrics No. 3 with a course of neonatology, which was headed by Professor V.P. Alferov.

During this visit I met many people and learnt a lot, but the evening I spent with Olga Kuznetova in her Emergency Department sticks in my memory. Her excellent English was a great relief since I spoke no Russian, and I had spent the last two weeks trying to communicate with people struggling with English or using my shaky French and even worse German. Even more important was that more than anyone else I met on this first visit Olga seemed to understand that there was a world of healthcare outside Russia where things were done differently, and she was keen to engage with that world.

The next year I hosted two Russian doctors in England, and via them I sent Olga some educational material produced by the RCGP about training in emergency medicine for primary care doctors – you could not just look things up on the internet in those days, and even international post was unreliable. A few months later I returned to Saint Petersburg for a conference on primary care development. The presentations both from Russian and foreign participants were variable, but Olga's presentation on a 6 week training in emergency medicine for GP's at MAPS stood out for its excellence, and I was delighted when she told me later that the booklet I had sent her had helped her design it.

Over the next couple of years the relationship between primary care specialists in the UK and MAPS prospered, involving Prof Gubachov's and Prof Krillov's Departments and also Prof Gurin's Dept of Marine Medicine. We organised seminars in Saint Petersburg and visits by Russian doctors to the UK. We were delighted when we heard in 1995 that MAPS intended to create a Department of Family Medicine to bring together its work on training for primary care health professionals in one Department.

Our link grew and strengthened, involving not just Olga and myself but many other members of the Department and people working in primary health care in the UK – mainly doctors but also nurses and healthcare managers. Our shared activities included launching the Russian Journal of Family Medicine, work on guidelines development, on sexual health, on educational and assessment methods, and on ways to promoting concordance between nurses and patients. More than twenty health professionals from the UK visited Russia under the partnership, and a similar number came from Russia to the UK, where they not only learnt how things were done here but were able to teach UK professionals about Russian culture and healthcare. Many more were reached by seminars and lectures given by Russian doctors in England and British participants in Saint Petersburg and through out joint publications in both English and Russian.

Much of this work was funded by UK Government grants, but two members of Olga's department gained travel scholarships from the RCGP to visit the UK, one of which won the prize for the best application that year. As the economy improved some Russians were able to fund their own travel to the UK, and those involved in the UK end of the partnership were pleased to help organise their time in the UK and reciprocate the hospitality they had enjoyed in Saint Petersburg.

I retired from academic work in 2009 and my friend and colleague Professor Dame Lesley Southgate who had worked closely with me on the UK end of the partnership also retired around the same time. These changes, combined with an increasingly strained political relationship between the Russian and British governments which made it harder to get funds for collaborative work, meant that the partnership became less active, but it did not end our friendships. E-mail and Facebook have made it much easier to keep in touch than in the early days when the only contact we could manage between visits was the occasional fax. Perhaps with the advent of Zoom and online streaming UK friends will even be able to share in some of your 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations – though sadly not in the wine and cavier!

We congratulate you on your many achievements over the last 25 years and wish you will for the next quarter of a century.

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