

**TRAINING, EDUCATION, ACCREDITATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SURGERY IN EUROPE: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION OF MEDICAL SPECIALISTS (UEMS)**

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**Professor Vassilios Papalois  
Consultant Transplant and General Surgeon  
Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust**

**UEMS, Secretary General**

**Introduction:**

The European Union of Medical Specialists, is the oldest (established in 1958) and the biggest of the European Medical Organisations. It has 37 member Countries (from the European Union and beyond) representing a total of 1,600,000 million medical specialists. Each member Country is represented by its National Medical Association (in the case of the United Kingdom by the British Medical Association) and is governed by democratically elected Council and Executive. The UEMS has 43 Specialist Sections, 15 Multidisciplinary Joint Committees (MJC)s and 2 Thematic Federations (TFs) which offer a very wide and sound forum of collaboration of medical specialists across Europe.

The main objective of the UEMS is to influence European health policy by promoting:

- The interests of medical specialists in Europe
- High standards of care, training and practice
- Continuing Medical Education and Professional Development
- Quality assurance in specialist practice

The UEMS Section of Surgery is one of the biggest Sections of the UEMS having 12 Sub-Specialty Divisions, being supported by the National Surgical Associations of 37 member Countries and developing sound projects in surgical training and accreditation which are supported by more than 1,000 specialist surgeons across Europe. The United Kingdom

is represented in the UEMS Section of Surgery by the Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland (ASGBI).

**A crucial question:**

Considering the fact that the majority of European Countries have well developed training and accreditation systems there is a most important question that needs to be answered: is there a need for European projects in surgical training, education, accreditation and professional development?

I believe (and this of course reflects the view of the UEMS and the UEMS Section of Surgery) that that the categorical answer to this crucial question is YES for the following reasons:

1. Beyond any political debate, the fact of the matter is that the healthcare systems across Europe are inter-dependent due to the inevitable movement of healthcare professional and patients. This fact is coupled with the a clear need for quality assurance regarding the qualifications of healthcare professionals who move across Europe (and of course from outside Europe in Europe) as well as with quality assurance of the services provided in different European Countries.
2. There is a great need across the board for appraising and modernising the selection process for training, the structure and efficiency of training centres, the programmes of training of trainers, the programmes offering change of career direction for professionals who are already specialised and, last but not least, the process of revalidation and re-accreditation. It must be emphasized that, when it comes to the level of development of the above projects, there is huge variation across European Countries.
3. By 2020 (which is just around the corner...) we will be lacking ~1,000,000 healthcare professionals across Europe (Hofmann-Greifswald EU Commission report). The even more pressing issue is that we will be lacking those professionals who can offer general (surgical or medical) emergency care and not the specialists. This fact has been confirmed by a very sound analysis by the ASGBI for the field of emergency surgery and shows that, when it comes to workforce planning, we are way behind and totally unprepared across Europe to face what is coming our way.
4. Healthcare systems across Europe face enormous financial pressures and cuts in their budgets while at the same time they are asked to look after more patients with more complex problems. In addition, patients have very high expectations not only for the clinical outcome of their care but for their quality of life as well. The challenge becomes even greater when it is seen in the background of an

ever aging population with big and complex health needs and the demand for services closer to home, especially for the two extremes of the spectrum: children and the elderly.

***The challenges mentioned above are clearly not exclusively the challenges of one Country and therefore the solutions can only be achieved through common effort and collaboration.***

***The philosophy of any such European project is to build on existing experience and expertise across Europe and result in consensus not for the lowest common denominator but for the highest commonly accepted standards.***

**UEMS projects to address the current and future challenges in training, education, accreditation, revalidation and professional development:**

1. The UEMS European Training Requirements (ETRs).

The UEMS process for developing the ETRs for a certain specialty or competency, is initiated and coordinated by the relevant UEMS Section. A very wide consultation process takes place across Europe involving: the 37 national specialists associations represented in the Section, the relevant national and European scientific societies, colleges, universities, national professional bodies and accreditation authorities. This is a thorough and robust process that takes almost 2 years to complete before the final product of the widest possible consensus for the highest commonly accepted standards is presented for a final discussion at the UEMS Council meeting where the 37 National Medical Associations will vote to accept it, or ask for minor or substantial revisions. It is a clearly a very sound process that has the value that represents pan-European experience, expertise and approval and covers the whole spectrum of training-education-assessment-accreditation-professional development clinically, academically and professionally.

From the moment the ETRs for a certain specialty are approved, the UEMS offers them across Europe as its view regarding the way forward and it is entirely up to individual Countries to decide if they wish to see them only as quality control markers or use them partly or in total as their national requirements.

2. Quality control of the UEMS ETRs and the UEMS assessments.

The UEMS has established the Council of European Specialist Medical Assessments (CESMA) that is responsible for the quality control process of the UEMS ETRs and assessments.

Every 2-3 years, CESMA appraises each of those ETRs/ assessments through a thorough process that is governed by an appraisal committee which has members from a variety of UEMS Sections as well as external appraisals from colleges, universities or national accreditation authorities. The appraisal process consists of an initial detailed report by the UEMS ETRs/ assessment Board, followed by a detailed inspection of all the relevant documents and an onsite visit of the assessment events. The appraisal committee produces an analytical report for all aspects of the ETRs/ assessment process which is then discussed at the UEMS Council resulting in approval or request for improvements.

The process has been so successful that now organisations offering exams outside the UEMS have requested to go through the UEMS-CESMA appraisal to ensure quality control of their work.

### 3. Accreditation of training centres

The UEMS put a lot of weight on the accreditation of training centres across Europe. In very simplifying terms, important as it is to accredit the “product” (trainee) it is equally or even more important to accredit the system producing this “product” (training centre). The process is similar to the one for appraisal of the UEMS ETRs/ assessments, with an accreditation committee with most experienced members from and beyond the UEMS. An initial report and review of the documents is followed by an onsite visit and inspection of all the activities of the applying centre along with interviews of all stake holders. The most important criterion for this appraisal which result or not in accreditation is the activity of the applying centre (clinical and academic) per trainee and how this translates finally into professional development.

For centres that have been UEMS accredited, the UEMS serves as a springboard of collaboration to allow them to develop and offer European training fellowships. This offers excellent opportunities for trainees across Europe for top class training, mentoring and professional development.

### 4. Preparatory courses

The organisation of preparatory courses (always overbooked and highly rated) for the UEMS assessments, is something that was generated following the request of trainees across Europe. The UEMS assessments are getting more and more popular and trainees have asked for a forum to help them to prepare for those assessments. The courses do not aim to offer to attendees “tips and tricks” as to how to be successful in the assessments. The aim is to

allow trainees who are used to and are well prepared for their national assessments to benchmark their knowledge and skills against European standards and be equally well prepared for the content and format of a European assessment.

#### 5. The UEMS European Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (EACCME)

EACCME is the UEMS flagship project when it comes to accreditation of international live and e-learning educational events. EACCME reviews ~1,800 applications per year from all over the world. The review is based on very robust criteria which are established by the EACCME Advisory Council which has a great wealth of members from the UEMS as well as from all other relevant bodies: scientific societies, professional organisations, national accreditation authorities, colleges, universities. The review and accreditation process is being done from three different angles: administrative (UEMS EACCME Office), compliance with national standards and guidelines (relevant National Accreditation Authority) and specialist (UEMS Section in collaboration with the relevant European Scientific Society). In addition, the UEMS has an agreement for a mutual recognition of credits between EACCME and the American Medical Association as well as the Royal College Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

Currently, the UEMS EACCME is working on further advancing the EACCME through the EACCME 2.0 project that gives emphasis on:

- Making the whole process much faster and more efficient.
- Enlarging the EACCME accreditation portfolio by including accreditation of modern/ state of the art educational material.
- Enhance the role of trusted providers.
- Advance the onsite quality control mechanisms for the accredited events.
- Collaborate with a broader spectrum of healthcare professionals.

It is anticipated that all the elements of the EACCME 2.0 project will be in place by the end of 2016.

#### 6. New UEMS network and working groups

The UEMS has recently established the Network of Accredited Clinical Skills Centres of Europe (UEMS-NASCE) that facilitates accreditation and collaboration of clinical skills centres in Europe and beyond. In addition, two working groups are focusing on establishing a UEMS School of Assessors as well as on the future of the format and content of the UEMS assessments.

## 7. The UEMS professional e-portfolio and “tool” for revalidation

The next ambition of the UEMS is to establish an e-portfolio for all medical specialists in Europe that will help them at any given time to benchmark their qualifications against European standards (adjusted for their level of experience and seniority) guide them as to how they can “catch up” if needed and offer them in this way the opportunity for a meaningful and productive real time self-revalidation.

## 8. The Domus Medica Europea

The new UEMS headquarters in Brussels, a fully refurbished, state of the art business and conference centre is offered for professional networking to Colleagues across Europe and beyond aiming to build collaboration and facilitate innovation in the field of training-education-accreditation and professional development.

### **In a nutshell:**

With the great support of the National Surgical Associations (the ASGBI being a characteristic and really shining example) the UEMS and the UEMS Section of Surgery have established a variety of robust projects in support of the professional development of Colleagues across Europe and beyond. It is a continuous and much re-warding effort that aims to pave the way for a bright future for surgical trainees and surgical specialists.