

Development of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Doctors Specialty in Latvia

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In the field of rehabilitation, the two main strategic directions for reducing the functional limitations caused by diseases are rehabilitative and curative. Most direct work with patients through therapy in the rehabilitation process is provided by therapists of various professions, the rehabilitation doctor plays an important role in providing internal coordination of the rehabilitation process, responsible for diagnostics, invasive procedures, pharmacotherapy, and overall responsibility for outcomes.

Until the restoration of independence the specialty of rehabilitation doctor did not exist and when starting to organize the Latvian rehabilitation services system, the health care system faced a significant shortage of physicians with the necessary qualifications.

An important step was the creation of a modified residency in rehabilitation in 1995-1996 with the assistance of Andrejs Kiršteins and Ēriks Puriņš, a Latvian rehabilitation doctors living in the United States. It is also noteworthy the long-standing refusal of physical medicine physicians to include in the rehabilitation specialty.

However, significant changes in the specialty of rehabilitation physicians are related to Latvia's inclusion in the Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine Section of the European Union of Specialized Medical Societies and Board (UEMS PRM Section & Board) since 2001 - Aivars Vētra and Anita Vētra. RSU Doctor Honoris Causa Prof. Črt Marinček from Slovenia played a major role in this initiative and also assisted her colleagues from Lithuania and Estonia in this field. Being a member of this association has made it possible to significantly change the only residency program for rehabilitation doctors in Latvia according to the European Training Requirements (ETR) requirements, to certify NRC Vaivari as a European training center and to offer new doctors.

Currently, preparation of Latvian Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine doctors in the RSU residency program meets all requirements of ETR. The main training bases are NRC Vaivari, Rīga Eastern Clinical University Hospital and Children's Clinical University Hospital.

PRM medical services are mainly available in Rīga, Jurmala, Jelgava, Valmiera, Liepāja and Ventspils, but in Latgale and many places outside the major cities, the availability of PRM medical services is problematic. The high average age of PRM physicians in Latvia is also a concern. The prolonged transition from the USSR period to the independent state of Latvia as a European Union state rehabilitation system has also caused a break in research and training of academic physicians, and during the last twenty years only four rehabilitation specialists have received a doctor's degree in medicine.



Consequently, Latvia's involvement in the UEMS PRM Board & Section has significantly changed the training of rehabilitation physicians and is in line with ETR requirements, but significant improvements are needed in the organization of PRM physicians' work to ensure greater accessibility and more focus on research activities.