

EVIDENCE BASED MEDICINE - Current concerns and perspectives.



INTERVIEW GUIDE with Prof. univ. dr. Lucian PUȘCAȘIU

He was born in 1963 in Blaj and graduated from the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Târgu Mureș in 1989.

He was appointed university professor at University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology George Emil Palade, Department of Obstetrics-Gynecology-in 2014, after taking the habilitation exam in 2013. Since 2013 he is the director of the Doctoral School Council and coordinator of the master's degree in Advanced Medical-Pharmaceutical Research at UMFST George Emil Palade, Târgu Mureș.

Over the years he has been a member of several international projects aimed at maternal and fetal health in West Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

He is the author of over 60 articles published in internationally recognized journals that have cumulated over 800 citations to date.

Reporter: *Prof Lucian Puscasiu, the reason we consider our readers will be interested in knowing your opinion about some of the main current concerns of the medical scientific community is strong based on your long-term experience and involvement with the international evidence-based medicine (EBM) international community and especially with Cochrane collaboration. Could you tell our readers more about how you became involved with the EBM international community, what motivated your initial interest and what kept you motivated?*

Lucian Puscasiu: In order for your readers to better understand the context, please allow me to talk a little bit about my background, as a sort of „mise-en-scene”.

I have graduated from the General Medicine Faculty of the Targu Mures Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy (today the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology George Emil Palade) in 1989 – this was at the end of the last century, in the dark ages before the internet; this is already difficult to imagine.

„Reading critically a medical paper” is a sentence that neither I nor my colleagues have heard during our studies and the term Evidence Based Medicine was introduced by Gordon Guyatt only in 1992 at the McMaster University in Canada.

My generation has studied the medicine of a different era, one dominated by „eminence-based medicine”. The world was listening to, was learning from and wished to practice the medicine of the great medical personalities, of the professors and chief clinicians, and envied their professional experience.

I had the luck to discover by chance a book that had an essential impact on myself at that time, when I was just starting my residency in obstetrics – gynaecology; it is the 1989 edition of “Effective Care in Pregnancy and Child-birth”. Starting from this book I was first contaminated, then have converted and finally have become addicted – all still present today.

The concept of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) has been included by the British Medical Journal in the list of the most important discoveries in the medicine of the last 150 years (along with anesthesia, antibiotics, etc.) and the impact of the concept is difficult to assess. Of course, there have been extremely many controversies – which are still very much alive today. But we are in a situation where we can make an analogy between EBM and democracy – none of them is perfect but we do not have something better at the moment.

In this regard, I was lucky - in various places in the world, on various occasions - probably due to affinity - I met extraordinary people, dedicated to promoting EBM. And over time, I became a member of the Cochrane Gynecology and Infertility Group, led by Cindy Farquhar, a professor at Auckland University.

R: *Over the last few decades the EBM community has largely increased and has become a global phenomenon which continue to attract interest. How are we doing on a national level?*

LP: Today, the EBM movement is, of course, a global phenomenon primarily thanks to the Cochrane Group, which since 1992 has become an organization with subsidiaries in more than 140 countries and followers and

collaborators everywhere. I'm not in a position to comment on some of the controversy surrounding the Cochrane organization - probably inherent at this scale. But I can argue that the principles of evidence-based medicine promoted by the Cochrane Organization have changed the face of medicine in recent years around the world. The same principles are now recommended in medical research, which isAC also going through a crisis of resources, redundancy and quantity to the detriment of quality, accuracy and replicability - we are of course talking about evidence based research. In Romania, these aspects are known, of course, but to an insufficient extent, in my opinion. Unfortunately, evidence-based medicine is too often considered a fad, a statistical extravagance, promoted by individuals who, for example, do not know how to treat a case and come up with arguments from meta-analyses published in vain. Our medical universities have not explicitly included this concept in their programs, as a result it is taught unsystematically, only due to individual initiatives - more than commendable! - of some EBM followers.

Of course, it should be mentioned that after the year 2000, several medical professional societies agreed on the need for clinical guidelines for medical practice in Romania. It was also foreseen that these clinical guidelines would be based on scientific evidences (i.e. EBM). In some cases this has happened. The problem is that from the existence of a clinical guide to its implementation in daily practice at the national level the path is very long and the successes are rather exceptions.

I think that the moment of introducing EBM in our country was not exactly favourable because the generation of leaders at that time were lacking the required education; heads of clinics and respected teachers, which have reached the top of the medical and academic hierarchy, were now facing a completely new problem: they were forced to conduct scientific research and to write papers for which the rigor required was not understood at a generational level and the required skills (e.g. study design, statistical analysis, critical evaluation and selection of existing evidence in literature, etc.) could not be mastered simply, easily and in a short time.

This state of affairs means that currently there is still no critical mass of individuals ready to provide appropriate advice for the selection, planning and conduct of truly relevant and scientifically rigorous studies, respectively to fight for the implementation of the recommendations that

results from the analysis and interpretation of these studies.

Surely this stage was similar in other places in Europe or in the world, where today the EBM concepts are much more present and institutionalized and this forces us to hope ...

R; *What is your vision on the development of EBM in Romania in the coming years? As you are now working on an application for setting up a Cochrane affiliated center in Romania. Could you tell us more about that?*

LP: We must say that the interest for EBM in Romania is a serious one, but probably dispersed on an individual level. As a result, it is somewhat unfair that we still have a relatively modest Romanian contribution to scientific production such as that promoted by the Cochrane group - I am referring here to systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses.

A few years ago, a consortium of universities was established in Romania, with the aim of setting up and operating a Cochrane Center. Thus, the Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest, the Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Iași and the George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology in Târgu Mureș have agreed on a financing, promotion and mutual support plan in order to launch in Romania a Cochrane collaborating center.

This center will initially have the status of Cochrane Affiliate Center and will operate under the tutelage of Cochrane Austria. We are extremely optimistic that the efforts to convince the Cochrane management in London will be followed by success and we hope to announce the public launch of Cochrane Romania as soon as possible.

We wish that the partnership of the 3 Universities to serve as well as a model for the future functioning of the centre, namely not a closed club but an area in which to bring together all those interested in the EBM movement and which to our knowledge are not few: from people outside of medicine interested in the high quality of medical evidence produced and promoted by the Cochrane organization, to young researchers at the beginning of their careers and up to names already established in Romanian medical research.

Thank you for your kindness in answering our