

General information Educational training

Educational training for physicians for people with intellectual disability (AVG)

In 2000 the Dutch minister of health recognized the medical care for people with an intellectual disability as a new medical specialization. The educational training for this new specialization takes place at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, as a part of the institute for training of general practitioners. It is a three year postgraduate university training for physicians. It consists of a combination of working and learning in the field of care for people with ID. Part of the training is an orientation in closely related fields of medicine, like neurology, genetics and psychiatry. Finishing the education gives the physicians the title: AVG, arts voor verstandelijk gehandicapten (physician for people with intellectual disability).

A new and different specialization

During the last twenty years medical care for people with ID has developed towards a separate field in medicine. In the beginning it was mainly based on experiences of physicians working in the field. Recently the scientific basis of this specialization started to develop. Medical care for people with ID distinguishes from other specializations:

- it is exclusively intended for people with ID
- the etiology of the intellectual disability in this group is miscellaneous, there are often complex and multiple disorders and complications which are different from disorders in "normal" population
- care for people with ID is longitudinal and has a strong multidisciplinary context
- there is a different presentation of complaints and diseases
- there are diagnostic and therapeutically problems caused by the intellectual and physical impairments of the patients
- the level of intellectual impairments has a strong influence on the capacity of the patients to make their own decisions, so communication with (professional) caregivers, parents and family is frequent and requires special skills.

The attitude towards people with ID has changed considerably during the last two decades. Not only in The Netherlands, but also in a large part of the western world. People with intellectual disability participate in normal society because of the replacement of institutional care by community-based care. Government, parents and organizations of caregivers are pursuing full-valued citizenship. General practitioners, who are not specially trained on the medical aspects of the care for people with ID, give medical care more often. It was feared that in the process of de-institutionalizing a lot of knowledge of medical care for people with ID was going to be lost. The NVAVG (the Netherlands Society of physicians working with people with ID) started around 1994 on a long road to getting this specialization recognized. With the start of the educational training in December 2000 one of the main goals of the NVAVG was reached. Attention could now be focused on further development of the profession, on the scientific base and also on the organization of medical care for this special group. The future position of the AVG is not yet clear altogether, but the recognition of the specialization gives a lot of chances to establish a good professional basis.

Education of physicians for people with ID

The three year training course for physicians for people with ID consists, like all specializations, of a practical part and an academic part: four days a week of practical work, and the fifth day spent at university.

The didactical principles of the training are based on modern educational principles like problem orientation and self-activity. The construction of the educational training resembles the training of GP's and physicians for the elderly in The Netherlands. Different educational methods are being used, like group teaching, bedside teaching, interactive teaching lessons of an experienced AVG, educational courses, supervision, intervision, literature study and presentation. Practical experiences and theory are integrated. Social and communicative skills are trained.

The curriculum

The curriculum consists of three periods of 12 months. In the first year of the training the trainee works in an institute for the care of people with ID. With supervision of an experienced AVG the trainee learns with increasing independence to give adequate medical care to people with ID living in the institute. Three times a month the trainee gets an educational training at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

The second period exists of three or four traineeships in relevant medical specializations like neurology, pediatrics, genetics and psychiatry. Also in the second year the trainees work fulltime on their own, intensively supervised, research project on ID-medicine. Every week there is an educational training at the university in Rotterdam. The topics are related to the topics of the traineeship.

The third year of the educational training the trainee works in the former institute again, but now has other tasks. Trainees learn to work in other services for people with ID, like group homes and daycenters where they have an advising and coordinating role. Working at an outpatient clinic for ID-medicine is essential too. During the last year the training at the university is focused on consultation and advice and on complex problems. During the whole curriculum there are several courses of more than one day on scientific skills and some other issues.

Educational program at the Erasmus University Rotterdam

As mentioned above, during the whole curriculum, the trainee participates in the educational training at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, three or four days every month. Usually the program consists of three separate parts:

- exchanging experiences
- training in social and communicative skills
- medical topics like general health problems, epidemiology, syndromes and comorbidity, diagnosis and treatment of specific medical problems, ethics, and law and quality improvement.

Training in scientific skills, the process of consensus making , medical audits are parts of the curriculum.

There is also an educational training program for the supervisor. This is the experienced AVG who supervises the trainee in the institute. Every month they follow a one-day program on educational and didactic skills.

Also medical topics are part of the program.

When is a physician a good AVG?

Just finishing the training doesn't mean you are an good AVG. A lot depends on the personal qualities of the AVG. For this work you need character aspects like flexibility, patience, humor, enthusiasm and affectionate feelings for people with ID, but with the ability to keep enough professional distance. Communicative and social skills are important. But above all: medical care for people with ID is a young and dynamic profession and the professional training has just started. A future AVG needs a pioneering mentality for helping to develop the training for this beautiful specialization.

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Further information

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