



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

Engelberg, 30 September 2005

4th Dialogue on Science in Engelberg comes to an end

Taboos in the healthcare service

How do leading personalities from the worlds of science, business, politics and society deal with economic, social and ethical taboos. What happens when the roles are suddenly reversed and “liberalizers” start beating the drum for patients’ rights? During the 3-day Dialogue on Science organized by Academia Engelberg, around 100 participants from German-speaking countries faced up to this challenge (PD).

The debate on healthcare was very intensive. In one exercise session, participants were expected to draw up a party programme for the healthcare service in 2010 which actually contradicted their own beliefs. Their efforts were observed by members of the Swiss students’ foundation *Schweizerische Studienstiftung*, who were also taking an active part in the conference.

Holding up a mirror

As they played out various scenes, the students showed in a rather exaggerated way how individuals behaved in the group dynamics of this process. Not only the different characters and the way in which they coped with their roles, but also the discussion contents were observed. The kind of statements that were overheard included “We’re politicians now, it doesn’t matter what we really believe” and “As politicians we have to deal with demands, not find solutions; that’s what the experts are for.” One noteworthy observation was the great respect shown towards taboos. While things such as a single health insurance scheme, two classes of medicine and solutions for death in the basic compulsory insurance were touched on, they were not really discussed through to the end.

Cheerful debate

Professor Heinz Gutscher, Social Psychologist at the University of Zürich, analysed the feedback from conference participants with the help of the students. In his introduction, he called for a “moratorium on political correctness”. “It is an enrichment for every group of people when they are given the opportunity to break free from their customary role and take up alternative positions for a time.” This fosters greater understanding for the “opposition”. The analysis revealed some striking results: After the role reversal, the “liberalizers” showed greater understanding for the views of the “patient protectors” than the latter did for the views of the “liberalizers”. The survey showed that, with regard to the future of the healthcare service, the discussion had given most participants new food for thought.

Résumé by Ruth Dreifuss

To conclude the conference, former Federal Chancellor Ruth Dreifuss took up the cudgels for the health insurance act (KVG) 10 years after its introduction. The system, she said, is not fundamentally bad. But it does show certain deficiencies that need correcting “so that the system does not implode”. She proposed the “managed care” model as a corrective measure, albeit with free choice of doctor. She also said that responsibilities should be better shared between the funding bodies (state, health insurance companies and citizens), the carers and the patients. She was completely against the idea of a capitation fee that is currently under discussion in Germany.

Are we running out of steam?

Next year, participants from the worlds of science, business, politics and society will address the subject of energy from 11 to 13 October 2006. The scarcity of resources and possible alternatives to nuclear and solar energy will be discussed. The conference will also examine what resources will be available to us throughout the world in the future. As Klaus Hug, President of the Academia Engelberg Foundation, put it in his closing speech at the conference, this subject is also fraught with taboos.

* * *

For further information for the media, please contact: Academia Engelberg,
Beatrice Suter, KommunikationsWerkstatt GmbH, Tel. +41 – 79- 211 10 44,
E-Mail: media@academia-engelberg.ch

This text along with various pictures from the conference can be downloaded now free of charge from : www.academia-engelberg.ch -> Welcome -> Media