



Nordic Congresses of General Practice

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Kunsten er ikke
at få en ide.
Enhver kan med lethed
få to -.
Kunsten er den
mellem to eller fler
ganske almind'lige
hverdagsideer
at se
hvilken en
der er go.
DK Kumbel

Nordic Congresses of General Practice

The Danish poem above in the vignette indicates that it is not an art to get an idea – the art lies in assessing which of more than one idea is the good one.

As neighbours, the Nordic countries have had close contact through many years – but in fact, before this century, mostly a contact through long and bitter wars, suppression, cutting off each other's heads and mainly being as cruel to each other as possible – not unlike the situation in the Middle East today.

Things changed with the change of century, and throughout the twentieth century good and close relationships evolved with increasing collaboration in business, science, and common politics – a good atmosphere to get good ideas and assess which ones are good.

Such an idea was the Nordic Congresses of General Medicine which started in 1979 in Copenhagen.

Very good relationships existed before these congresses, such as regular meetings of Nordic general practitioners – in the beginning mostly with “money” and structure and organization of general practice in the Nordic countries on the agenda. Education grad-

ually occupied more and more of the agenda – the postgraduate, continuing education, vocational training, and at the end of the sixties when Institutes of General Practice gradually evolved, the teaching of students in the medical curriculum in “the art of being a good general practitioner”.

“The art of being a good practitioner” – yes, indeed, we had no other ways of explaining general practice to the students and trainees in general practice than “an art” – with no imposing scientific basis. One of my lecturers at that time even described the diagnostic process to the students as an “art of magic, which some general practitioners knew by heart and others never learned or had the possibility to learn”. This is not more than fifteen years ago.

Not least in the Nordic countries, evolution placed Primary Medical Care/Health Care in focus during the seventies. Institutes of General Practice appeared and as an “ugly duckling” we appeared on the academic arena of the medical faculties. We were not always accepted by the other specialities, and were never left alone when important decisions or educational activities should take place within our domain. We were met with a range of reactions,

from fatherly protectionism to intense criticism from our colleagues in other disciplines. We became aware that, if we were to change from an "ugly duckling" to a beautiful white swan, as in Hans Christian Andersen, long-lasting and scientific activities lay in front of us. These were started, together and individually, and research activities also gradually became part of the regular Nordic meetings.

As time passed, a growing interest in having a meeting with research activities as the main theme became an idea, which was found so good that the first Nordic Congress in General Medicine took place from 6–9 June 1979 in Copenhagen.

They were proud days when we saw 400 general practitioners participating in a Congress of General Medicine with plenary lectures on "General Medicine as a Scientific Discipline", "Research Areas in Primary Medical Care", "Research Methods in Primary Medical Care", "Recruitment to Research in Primary Medical Care", followed by individual presentations of 63 research projects in 6 sections, and ending with an evaluation of "General Practice as a Scientific Discipline" – assessed at the background of the congress.

That all academic members of general practice were present and participated in plenum and in the sections was obvious and natural, but that so many "ordinary" general practitioners from all five countries attended the congress was very impressive.

It is not the place here to assess the scientific quality of the presentations in 1979 – all levels were represented within clinical research, epidemiological research, educational research, and research about the function of general practice. The main thing was

that we had started, the congress was a success, we came very much closer to each other – the idea had proved to be good and everybody wanted it to continue.

So, since then, Nordic Congresses of General Medicine have taken place every second year – Norway 1981 (Bergen), Finland 1983 (Tampere), Sweden 1985 (Lund), Iceland 1987 (Reykjavik), and Denmark again in 1989 (Århus) starting a new Nordic round. No doubt, quantitatively and qualitatively, the Nordic Congresses of General Medicine have reached far since 1979. Nearly 600 actively participating general practitioners in 1989 gave about 150 presentations (papers, posters, etc.) of scientific results, and undoubtedly the quality of the major part of the presentations was considerably higher than 10 years ago, when we started in 1979. It is obvious too that general practitioners are now more relaxed when they present their work to a national and international forum of colleagues.

Naturally, the Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care was a consequence and initiative of these congresses. Also this was a good idea, now in existence for six years and facing a long life. Last but not least the 6th congress awarded a research prize for the first time – given to Doctor *Dag Bruusgaard*, Oslo, for his valuable contributions to research in general practice and general medicine. Could this create the next good idea – a Nordic College of General Practitioners?

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