

It is my great pleasure to open the 18th Congress of the Nordic Federation of Midwives, thus celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of our cooperation. Welcome to the Representative for the Ministry of Interior and Health, dear colleagues of the steering committee of the NFM, dear congress participants.

You should all come up here... Looking out on so many midwives and student midwives is a joyous experience indeed - but then again, if you did, the room would look rather empty. So please stay seated!

First, I would like to express gratitude to Her Royal Highness, Crown Princess Mary, who kindly consented to being the patroness of the Congress. We would have loved to welcome Her Royal Highness to this opening, in respect of her unrelenting efforts for women and families in need, in Denmark as in underprivileged countries. Unfortunately, Her Royal Highness has been unable to attend the congress due to obligations abroad, also concerned with women's health, as the Crown Princess is attending the high profiled Washington DC conference, Women Deliver.

Thank you to all our sponsors, without whose support much had looked different.

I want all of the congress participants to make it worth the support for the sponsors by visiting the exhibitions frequently, and with avid curiosity.

We intend to learn from all sides of this event, the scientific programme, the social programme and the exhibitions, for future joint efforts for health for newborn, women and their families.

Thank you to the scientific committee for the generous amount of time that all of you have put into directing this congress towards professional fulfilment, and warm thanks to all reviewers. Also your time has been put to excellent use.

And moderators: you're in for an exciting congress, thanks for your preparedness to step in and tie the programme intelligently together!

The theme of our Congress is Practice and Science - simple as that! And still these two words cover the entire field of our midwifery studies, work, research, aspirations and hopes.

It is the first congress of the Nordic Federation of Midwives to be conducted in English, in recognition of the growing globalisation; we all want to be able to attract international

speakers and participants, and also in recognition of the younger generations' choice of second language.

Let us look forward to three days of enjoyable and knowledgeable communications: We have often in Nordic and other international settings mingled freely and used smiles, hands and drawings to be exactly sure of what our colleague is sharing with us.

In the coming days we will be meeting mainly in English, but hopefully with exchanges in the Nordic languages and most certainly with a lot of laughing and helpful translations between us, when needed.

The world needs midwives, now more than ever.

United Nations Family Planning Agency, UNFPA, states that midwives are key healthcare facilitators in helping to achieve Millennium Development Goals 4 (reducing child mortality), 5 (improving maternal health) and 6 (combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases).

On my own account I would add that also the access to midwives is a step towards Gender Equality, MDG 3. If a woman is not allowed to seek professional help, or has no means to do so, then the gender gap is detrimental to her health.

We know that women throughout the world are dying in unsafe abortions and births, from haemorrhage, infection, malnourishment and dystocia, all because of low resources and no or unskilled help to them.

Midwives make the difference between life and death.

Many midwives from the Nordic countries work internationally, sharing hands-on and evidence based approach to better health for all with local midwives, nurses and doctors fighting against the effects of poverty and exhaustion of natural reserves.

In our safe and - even in times of crises - prosperous Nordic countries, no woman must die because of the lack of skilled help - over hundreds of years, the Nordic model of midwifery alongside with development of medical knowledge has proved a great success.

However, unnecessary medical intervention has become part of our health system, and all of us foresee further problems, for instance in the apparent shortage of means to provide the evidence based model of sufficient number of midwives to women and families.

We see development of lifestyle related health problems in the population, and there is increasingly evidence to support the fear of chemical pollution causing low fertility.

Moreover pressure on families and on midwives pushes more and more into a life of stress, forever trying harder.

Of course medical intervention is a general good as well. Medical intervention and treatment can save lives, and sometimes even create lives. But... at its worst, it can also take lives.

This is the challenge of the health professionals in cooperation with the public: to find the balance between too little and too much. Midwives rise to this challenge, taking the old rule: "first, do no harm" at face value.

We also have a lot to offer, in order to solve the great health problems ahead. In the next three days you'll be presented to a wide variety of propositions as to how we - in the best way - offer our services and form our professional lives in securing the best start for all newborn and their mothers and fathers, sexual health for all and a healthier population in an equitable manner, even given the fact that resources in our public sectors are under pressure.

Dear participants and sponsors: Dive into midwifery science and practice, and walk out of here, hopefully inspired to develop *your* own practice, *your* project, *your* thesis through contacts over borders in our sixty year old community of midwives in the North.

Thanking you for your attention, it is now my honour and privilege to welcome an address to Congress from Mr. Kristian Wendelboe, CEO in Denmark's Ministry of Interior and Health.

Mr. Kristian Wendelboe kindly steps in for the Minister for Interior and Health Bertel Haarder, who has had to stay close to the voting buttons in the Danish Folketing in these hours. I know from earlier experience of a similar kind that we have been sent an excellent substitute; we all have reason to look forward to your greeting, so, Mr. Kristian Wendelboe, please, the floor is yours!

Lillian Bondo,
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