

# Editorial

## Perspectives on Dermatology in the Nordic Countries: Norway

The FORUM will publish a series of reports on dermatology in the Nordic countries, its present status and future perspectives. In this issue Dr. Claus Lützow-Holm, former chairman of the Norwegian Society of Dermatology, describes the situation in Norway. He gives a detailed analysis and evaluation. The conclusion is that there is a major problem for Norwegian dermato-venereology, both quantitatively measured as the number of dermatologists and qualitatively measured as academic production.

University departments are located in Oslo (Rikshospital and Ullevål), Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø. Requisites for research in terms of space, personnel and instruments in these departments are far from manifold, to express it diplomatically, and the hospital departments are essentially geared to deliver core education and general and special services in the field of practical therapy in this country, with a small population spread over a large territory. Academia is in the present situation primarily taken care of by individuals with temporary interests; very little is handled by multidisciplinary teams. There does not seem to be any real understanding in the system that strong centres of excellence are the engines in modern research and education, and it seems like Norway is awaiting another Armauer Hansen, who, under primi-



tive conditions, will do a solo performance in medical progress.

The overall health policy of the past and present was oriented toward the periphery and had the aim of delivering good health service at the lowest possible cost to every part of Norway. This policy was successful, and excellence in dermatological treatment is or may be practised under the umbrella of the health insurance system and in private clinics, which also find the capacity to engage in cosmetic dermatology. The private sector is subjected to detailed health economic calculations and business statistics, and for the last decade society has invested in this sector and created expansion aimed at equal opportunity for treatment. In contrast, the hospital clinics were objects for cut-backs, following the mainstream political

debate on the theme of hospitals as burdens for innocent taxpayers, who nevertheless expect excellent treatment both day and night.

No true overall strategy seems to exist for the Norwegian health care system, or any well-defined and well-functioning responsibility before and after the upcoming elections. This is compensated for by administrations counted in hundreds or thousands, who run their different enterprises from one budget year to the next and make the best out of it, with emphasis on economy and savings, as they are asked to do.

Little dermatology competing with large specialties and the bombardment of the public with news of any kind has a weak platform, both in the health care system and in the public debate. Who will notice and respond efficiently to a cry for help from dermatology?



The message to the political and administrative systems in Norway from the Norwegian Dermatological Society and Dr. Lützow-Holm is crystal clear: help! Future dermatovenereology in Norway is in trouble and is on its way to serious problems,

with a decline in the dermatology service offered to the population due to the shortage of dermatologists and the collapse of the already fragile academia of the specialty. What is needed is a strengthening of the central functions, with emphasis on

research and education. This is the engine. Overall long-term strategies, decisions and commitments as to how to improve the situation in the country are critically needed, and soon. Talent swiftly fades away, disappears and dies if not cultivated. Human resources in medicine grow and bloom only slowly. It would be irresponsible of the political system if it did not help to find an efficient solution, and one which has a vision beyond money. Norway has high moral standards and at the same time ranks among the richest countries in the world. There is no excuse for ignorance.

**Jørgen Serup**  
Editor-in-Chief

The illustrations are from Norway's National Day on May 17, 2000 - contrasts between the young and old. Will the students, in Norwegian the "russ", choose medicine and dermatology?

