

Letters, Questions, Answers, etc

Interview with Jaakko Karvonen, Senior Vice President of the Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa

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Always ready for new challenges

International circles of dermatology know Jaakko Karvonen as a Nordic colleague of great activity. He seems to be a man who never has a bad day, and he has clear views on things. His interests in various activities within national and international organisations show his sociable personality; he was the secretary of the Finnish Society of Dermatology for three years, then vice president and finally president, serving the Society for a total of nine years. He was also a member of the board of Nordisk Dermatologisk Förening for eight years, and a member of the board of the European Society of Dermatological Research for six years.

In May 2002, Jaakko Karvonen was congratulated on his new post as the chief medical officer of Helsinki and Uusimaa specialist medical care. Having spent 25 years in Oulu, and one year in Helsinki, as the Professor of Dermatology, he - in his own words - "set off for a new career".

When Helsinki University Central Hospital and the Hospital Districts

of Helsinki and Uusimaa were joined under common administration three years ago, a giant was born, even by international standards. This health district is responsible for the specialist care of 1.5 million people, which equals one third of the Finnish population. The new Hospital District has 21 hospitals and 20000 employees. The budget is one billion Euros a year. The Senior Vice President is the highest medical officer of the Hospital District.

Driven by his commitment to protecting doctors' interests, Jaakko Karvonen spent 20 years on the Delegate Board of the Finnish Medical Association, serving as chairman of the Delegate Board for the last seven years. This assignment taught him the noble art of negotiation and brought him in touch with a vast network of social leaders. This was a very effective training period for his present position as chief medical officer, and the acquired skills are important in his present work as a representative of the management. Those skills were also considered when filling the position.

What does a chief medical officer do? Well, there are lots of meetings. The seven-person top administration group meets regularly once a week.



Professor Jaakko Karvonen, Helsinki

Some jobs can, of course, be delegated to others, but e.g. all patient maltreatment statements are read and signed by the chief medical officer himself. Directing the medical tuition and research are his responsibility. The transfer from traditional to electronic patient documents is a fairly new task. The chief medical officer also has to sort out the worst conflicts within the personnel in cases where the lower levels of management haven't been able to solve the problems themselves. Jaakko Karvonen's interest and skills in economic matters are common knowledge, and although his original job description didn't include economic administration, a very convoluted situation was awaiting his expertise in that area. "Current pressures to cut the medical expenses and negotiations

dealing with these matters have made me work 24 hours a day, and sometimes - I must admit - without a formal agreement. The elimination of overlapping spheres of operation in small units has not always been appreciated by the personnel", he says.

Academic dermatology

Jaakko Karvonen is pleased with the high standard of clinical medical research in Finland, which is closely connected to good patient care. Clinical research is performed at the university hospitals, and the personnel is very involved to avoid difficulties in keeping up with constantly evolving medical procedures. The member communities pay for the medical expenses of hospitals in Finland, but the state supports both tuition and research, which Jaakko Karvonen considers an important factor for successful clinical research.

Medical funding is in crisis, and dermatological resources are among the first to risk reductions - "heroic" specialities seem to be more

important. However, dermatological problems are very common in open care patients, and adequate dermatological tuition is important.

According to Jaakko Karvonen, activity in European societies of Dermatology is important on a national basis: "Together we can defend our speciality." Also, Nordic co-operation is a valuable tradition, which should continue. Regarding the question of language, Jaakko Karvonen has a clear opinion: At Nordic congresses, the official language should be English.

"In specialist training within dermatology, dermatosurgery should be given more importance as a new field of interest. The follow-up of melanoma belongs to dermatologists." - is Jaakko Karvonen's visions on the future trends of our speciality.

Butterflies and generations of dermatology

Jaakko Karvonen's grandfather was a professor of dermatology, and his father was a chief dermatologist in

the Finnish army. Dermatology became familiar to Jaakko Karvonen as a small boy, because eczema was spoken about at home, where his father's private practice was located. The children in the family got used to seeing patients, and even booked appointments.

At the start of his medical studies, Jaakko Karvonen was interested in internal medicine, but eventually his interests turned to dermatology - without any orders from home regarding his specialisation.

"Since my years as a medical student I have relaxed by collecting butterflies." The interest has not been dilettante: Jaakko Karvonen has 17 scientific publications on butterflies to his name! The most valuable among these 17 publications is one describing a species new to science. His collection is the third largest in Finland.

The computer screen in his office, however, shows the smiling face of his eight-year-old daughter Sara, the very best way to alleviate everyday stress.