

Foreword

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In August 2018 the seventh conference in the series “Well-being in the Information Society” (WIS 2018) was organized in Turku, in co-operation between University of Turku and the Baltic Region Healthy Cities Association. The conference focused on inequalities in our societies representing an active approach called “Fighting Inequalities”.

Inequality describes in general an unfair situation in which some people have more rights or better opportunities than other people.

Health(care) inequalities or those in welfare can be defined as differences in health status or in the distribution of health determinants between different population groups, for example, differences in mobility between elderly people and younger populations or differences in mortality rates between people from different social classes. A growing number of inequalities are related to different competences and skills in the exploding information society, for example different access to information and data. Some health inequalities are attributable to biological variations or free choice and others are attributable to the external environment and conditions mainly outside the control of the individuals concerned. In the first case it may be impossible or ethically or ideologically unacceptable to change the health determinants, and so the health inequalities are unavoidable. In the second, the uneven distribution may be unnecessary and avoidable as well as unjust and unfair, so that the resulting health inequalities also lead to inequity in health.

The topic “Inequalities” was already the headline of WIS 2012, but the challenge to reduce inequalities which can be influenced by political decisions or the people themselves is still and forever on the agenda in most countries.

The role of researchers in the fight against inequalities is to identify and analyse these inequalities. New concepts and projects have to be developed, implemented and evaluated. WIS 2018 was one important hotspot where ambitious researchers from all over the world shared their ideas with international experts in very fruitful discussions. Many of the presentation opened the view on today’s problems and elaborate new approaches and solutions. Four of them – all from Finland – are published in this issue. Most of them show the extraordinary role of digital media for upcoming integrated offers in health care.

Tiina Nokkala discussed why citizen empowerment is very crucial for the development of our health care systems. In the future, based on an elderly society, lack of professionals and so on, the citizens, not only in the role of patients but also in their working life, have to take more responsibility for health by their own. This development can be described as consumer-centred health care. It is in the responsibility of the government to establish a framework, which makes innovative solutions possible.

Schools are very important institutions. A lot of changes in our societies must find their ways into changes of methods and the content of learning in schools. Without these developments the next generation will lack skills and knowledge to overcome the challenges which are already there or waiting “at the door”. Therefore, the author of the next paper focuses on Teachers Education Curriculum. Brita Somerkoski discussed skills and knowledge as a basis for Safety Competencies.

The third article raises up a fundamental question of science, as well as also in health care: How to measure the quality of structure, processes and their changes (here: healthcare and welfare). This leads to a very inspiring presentation about indicators, authored by

Petteri Mussalo, Virpi Hotti and Hanna Mussalo. They choose Finland as an example for their presentation, but their results and critical statements are relevant at least for all industrial countries. The article shows what is behind indicators, what they are able to visualize and what not!

The fourth article takes us into the centre of health care and shows a wonderful project, how technology can help to reduce inequality for a special, smaller group, in our countries: the dual-sensory impaired people. Stina Ojala presents how accessibility of TV media for the group mentioned can be established. This project was

realized in Finland and the UK. It is a very good example for cross nation transfers of solutions.

WIS 2018 was a very important step forward in the discussion about inequalities in health care and welfare. It works as an important networking and innovation hub for researchers. This process continues in year 2020.

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