



**Ávarp
forseta Íslands
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Heiðruðu ráðstefnugestir
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We all know the account given in the opening of the Bible where it is described how God created the Earth in six days and then decided to rest because the work was finished. There is, however, one problem with this description. It is not entirely accurate, because when it came to the creation of Iceland the Almighty became so fascinated with the possibilities that the creation has continued in our country until this very day: with new volcanoes, new lava fields, new islands, new geysers, earthquakes and other activity reminding us that we are still able to bear witness to the creation.

The creativity which nature demonstrates all over Iceland has also moulded the souls and the culture of the people and thus in recent decades led to many innovations and pioneering projects in the fields of science, technology and health based services and industry. Together with our friends in Northern Europe we are proud to be at the beginning of the 21st century in the forefront of developing health technology.

The achievements by doctors, researchers, scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs in the development of better health care and in the treatment of some of the most difficult diseases of our times are indeed remarkable and we now seem to be blessed with better prospects in this field than all previous generations.

The social and economic trends which now influence our communities endow an ever-growing importance upon the health sector. We are living longer and the proportion of the elderly in the population is constantly increasing; we are more demanding with respect to treatment

and care and the expenditures in this field, both private and public, have become a major part of national income.

The importance of discoveries and scientific progress will therefore keep on growing and the scope for business innovation and entrepreneurial skills will be an important part of the future profile of the health sector.

It is among the most interesting aspects of modern Iceland how in the field of health technology our society has become a promising laboratory for the development of new technologies and scientific progress.

Although the Icelandic nation is small it can offer some important lessons for others to contemplate, lessons drawn from the journey we have made from being one of the poorest countries in Europe into being now among the most affluent in the world, lessons on how a society of farmers and fishermen became so technologically advanced that Iceland is now a prime example of a highly developed information society with top scores in mobile phone penetration, Internet usage and personal computer ownership.

It is worth reflecting on how such a small nation has been able to become a significant partner in scientific progress within the highly advanced fields of medical and health research. There are of course many explanations but I want to emphasize three in particular.

Firstly, the Icelandic public health care system has been based on the principle of equal treatment for all and open access for everybody wherever they live in the country. The medical records which have been kept by local doctors and hospitals throughout the twentieth century have listed every visit and every treatment made in the country. This wealth of data has consequently remained within the public domain and can now serve as an important reservoir of knowledge for many different research projects. To be a doctor in Iceland has always been seen as a public service and society as a whole felt that it was responsible for the care and treatment given to those in need.

Secondly, this nature of the Icelandic health service created a strong culture of trust between doctors and the public. The goodwill shown by the people towards the medical profession has been extraordinary and consequently Icelanders have been very open and willing to participate in many different medical research projects, provide private information, blood and bio samples that in many other countries would have led to complicated privacy laws or extensive formal contracts. This culture of trust has enabled Icelandic doctors and other scientists to engage freely in

many different types of research and the nation has rejoiced in the results which have been achieved, almost as if they are national achievements.

Thirdly, we have been able to combine good medical training in our own country with access to universities, medical research institutes and hospitals in other countries for further and more specialised education. Thus Icelanders have studied and worked in the United States, in England, Sweden and elsewhere and on returning home they have created a specialized community which is continuously being nourished by inputs from many different institutions and countries, whereas in larger societies there is a tendency to train exclusively within one's own country. We have managed to be at one and the same time strongly Icelandic and truly international in our approach.

In addition the lack of extensive bureaucracy in our country, mainly because we don't have enough people to fill all the posts in big bureaucratic corridors of power, and also the personal nature of prevailing social contacts, have enabled young scientists and new research companies to establish extensive networks of cooperation with ministries and local authorities, hospital management and other administrative agencies. The pace of scientific discovery has consequently become quicker and the dialogue with the participants more relaxed and constructive.

Þessi jarðvegur hefur nýst vel hinu merka íslenska fyrirtæki Össur sem stofnað var af frábærum hugvitsmanni og starfaði fyrst í litlu húsnæði við gamla götu í Reykjavík en er nú orðið eitt fremsta og stærsta fyrirtæki í veröldinni í sinni grein með útibú og dótturfyrirtæki víða um lönd, keypti fyrir fáeinum árum bandaríska fyrirtækið Flex-Foot og fyrir fáeinum dögum bætti enn einni skrautfjöðrinni í hattinn með því að kaupa hið merka fyrirtæki Generation II sem er með starfsemi í Vancouver, Seattle og Brussel.

Spádómur um að Íslendingar gætu orðið forystuafl á heimsmarkaði í framleiðslu stoðtækja hefði fyrir einum áratug, hvað þá tveimur, verið talin fleipur eitt en árangur Össurar sýnir hve ríkuleg tækifæri gefast á þessu sviði heilsupjónustu.

Norræn samfélög hafa alla burði til að skara framúr í þessum eignum og sameina velferðarhugsjón, vísindapróun og framsækinn fyrirtækjarekstur.

Stoðtækjafraeðin eru ein besta sönnun þessa sem völ er á og ég vona að þing ykkar muni starfa í slíkum anda. Hér er á dagskrá mörg merk erindi, frásagnir úr norrænum reynslusjóðum og innlegg forystufólks á alþjóðavísu.

I also hope that the constantly changing theatre of light and colours which is now on display in our country will provide you with inspiration and enjoyment and the spectacle which the Almighty has bestowed upon Iceland will encourage you all to seek new discoveries and achievements. With such a wish I hereby declare the VI Nordisk Ortopedteknisk Kongress er hér með hafin.