



**Greetings
from
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**

The creative forces which are constantly transforming the nature of Iceland – volcanic eruptions, expanding lava fields, geysers, earthquakes, the ever-changing contrast between fire and ice – have also moulded the souls and the culture of the people.

Although our nation is small it offers important lessons for others 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, a significant partner in scientific progress within the highly advanced fields of medical and health research.

The Icelandic health care system is based on the principle of equal treatment for all, open access for everybody wherever they live. It has created a strong culture of trust between doctors and the public.

The goodwill shown by the people towards the medical profession has been extraordinary. They have been 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 almost as if they are national achievements.

I hope that your conference, the meetings of the International Spinal Cord Society and the Nordic Spinal Cord Society will be inspired by our cultural heritage and our achievements and also influenced by the creativity demonstrated by the Icelandic nature.

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