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## Volume 4 - Issue 1, 2010 - Country Focus: The Nordic Countries

### Cardiology in the Nordic Countries

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#### Overview of the National Societies of Cardiology in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark

##### Norwegian Society of Cardiology (NSC)

The Norwegian Society of Cardiology (NSC) was founded in 1969. Its main activities can be divided into:

**Organisational:** Provides advice and support for the Norwegian Medical Association related to education in cardiology, professional advice and defining national priorities for healthcare. Maintains international contact with the European Society of Cardiology (ESC).

**Educational:** Organises national meetings three times per year, and a regular Nordic cardiology meeting. Coordinates annual meetings for all cardiology trainees in Norway.

**Registries:** Organises the national pacemaker registry.

**Publications:** Runs 'Hjerteforum', the journal of the Norwegian Society of Cardiology which is published four times per year. In addition, Hjerteforum publishes Norwegian PhD. theses.

**Working groups:** Leads working groups for congestive heart failure, invasive cardiology, electrophysiology and echocardiography.

For the major part, cardiology services in Norway are under public finance. There are a few cardiologists without public financial support. As of January 4, 2010, there are 316 cardiologists currently practicing in Norway. Approximately 90 percent are members of the NCS.

The department of cardiology at Oslo University Hospital Rikshospitalet has approximately 15 senior consultants and 13 junior consultants. Activities include interventional cardiology with PCI, percutaneous aortic valves, congenital heart disease, heart transplantations and electrophysiology (including ICDs, CRTs and radiofrequency ablations). We have 10 coronary care unit beds and 15 on the regular ward.

To qualify as a practicing cardiologist in Norway, approval in internal medicine, which takes six years, is the first requirement. Three years of study in cardiology is needed in addition, but some overlap is possible, so that the minimum time required for education after internship is eight years. Candidates need to gain experience in all fields of cardiology, and trainees must obtain practical skills – for example, 50 independent and 150 assistant catheterisation procedures, 300 echocardiograms, 300 exercise ECG tests. There is no final exam, but the Norwegian Medical Association approves cardiologists after application.

*Information kindly provided by: Prof. Ketil Lunde, Department of Cardiology, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway*

##### Swedish Society of Cardiology

The Swedish Society of Cardiology was founded in 1947 and includes over 900 active members. Prof. Per Tornvall has been President of the society for the past three years and will be replaced by Prof. Lena Jonasson in April, 2010.

The society has six working groups:

- Coronary heart disease;
- Heart failure;
- GUCH;
- PCI;
- Arrhythmias, and
- Ethics/health economics.

The primary focus of the society is on the education of the profession, including training to become a cardiologist and inspections of the different cardiological training centres. The society arranges two meetings per year; the Cardiovascular Spring Meeting and an update meeting during the fall. Many of its members are active in ESC as FESC and in a variety of working groups and associations. In 2010, the society's national update meeting will take place in the European Heart House, 7 - 10 October.

The Swedish Heart Organisation encompasses five Swedish specialty societies: the Society of Cardiology; the Society of Clinical Physiology; the Society of Thoracic Anaesthesia and Intensive Care; the Society of Thoracic Radiology and the Society of Cardiac Surgery.

*Information kindly provided by: Prof. Per Tornvall, President of the Swedish Society of Cardiology and also Associate Professor of Cardiology, Department of Cardiology, Karolinska eUniversity Hospital Solna, Stockholm, Sweden*

##### Finnish Cardiac Society (FCS)

#### Key Facts

- Number of Cardiologists (Jan 2009): 227 altogether, from which 199 are in active working age. Out of the working aged cardiologists, 49 are women and 150 are men. (Source: Finnish Medical Association).
- Number of Cardiologists in Training: 38 training positions in five university hospitals and their regional/central hospitals. The founding meeting of the Finnish Cardiac Society (FCS) was held on November 13, 1967, in Helsinki. There were 37 founding fathers present.

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There are currently around 760 members, of which around 210 are consultant cardiologists and 38 are registrars in cardiology.

The remaining members include doctors with a special interest in cardiology (e.g. cardiac surgeons, anaesthesiologists, paediatric cardiologists, specialists in internal medicine, clinical physiology specialists, paediatrics and radiology) and other professionals with an interest in cardiovascular medicine. The society has 12 active working groups. Its board is composed of nine voting members elected by society members at the annual business meeting in January every even-numbered year. In addition, the board consists of the non-voting Editor-in-Chief of the membership journal *Sydänääni* (Heart Sound). Executive and course secretaries of the society also attend the board meetings. The board has eight meetings yearly.

The FCS has been a member of the European Society of Cardiology since 1968 and is an affiliated member of the American Heart Association and the World Heart Federation. The Finnish Cardiac Society works closely with the Finnish Heart Association in the role of promoting cardiovascular health in Finland. It organises several educational meetings in cooperation with other national medical associations and/or societies, such as the Finnish Hypertension Society, Finnish Society of Internal Medicine, Finnish Society for Thoracic Surgery and Finnish Society of Anaesthesiologists. The FCS also has 38 industrial members representing both the pharmaceutical and device companies in the field of cardiology.

The society's primary focus is on its scientific and educational aspects. In 2008, the FCS organised 143 educational events, with a total of over 4,300 participants. Its main meetings are the autumn meeting held in October, a spring meeting in March and an annual meeting in January.

The FCS grants around 90,000 euros yearly to Finnish professionals in the field of cardiology to financially support Finnish research and presenting research results in the field of cardiovascular diseases.

The FCS has 12 working groups dedicated to variety of specific areas in cardiology. Each one has a nucleus composed of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary, which is changed every second year.

The society publishes a journal entitled "*Sydänääni*", which is published five times per year with one central themed issue per year. The journal is distributed to society members as well as supporting industrial members and other groups such as medical directors of University and central hospitals in Finland.

#### **Danish Society of Cardiology (DCS)**

The Danish Society of Cardiology (DCS) was established on May 6, 1960, at the initiative of Professor Erik Warburg, due to the development of cardiology in the Nordic countries, and the parallel development of heart surgery. The first meeting of DCS was held on March 24, 1961, including six oral presentations and 33 participants.

#### **The Aims of the DCS are to:**

- Increase theoretical and practical knowledge and progress within cardiovascular disease, arrange scientific meetings for its members and provide continuing medical education;
- Advise the national authorities regarding medical education in cardiology, and
- Represent the specialty of cardiology in relation to Danish medical authorities and corresponding global organisations.

The main activities of the Danish Society of Cardiology (DCS) are educational events and initiatives to improve the treatment of cardiovascular diseases. Twelve working groups, matching those of the ESC lead these initiatives by arranging educational programmes, elaborating position papers and national guidelines and endorsing ESC guidelines with respect to national requirements.

One of the most challenging tasks is to argue for a consistent focus on the burden of cardiovascular disease in Denmark. This goal is achieved by a close collaboration with the National Board of Health and the Danish Heart Foundation.

A very important evolution in recent years is the introduction in 2005 of the "National Treatment Guideline for Heart Diseases", a web-based (PDA downloadable) guideline, which is updated every February, and which covers the latest international guidelines regarding heart disease. Also, ESC guidelines are increasingly endorsed in the national guidelines to the benefit of our patients.

The Board of the DCS comprises 10 cardiologists representing Denmark's five geographic regions, with representatives of university heart centres and regional hospitals with cardiology specialties. Board members meet monthly to discuss current tasks, updates, progress and future strategy.

The Danish Society of Cardiology has its own membership journal, "*Cardiologisk Forum*", which is in Danish and published quarterly. The journal is mailed to each member and also available online from the DCS website (only in Danish).

The two-day annual meeting is held in May and always includes a "Young Investigators Award" competition. Five abstracts representing the foremost cardiovascular science in Denmark are selected for oral presentation and then compete for grants in both basic science and clinical science categories. A research prize is awarded, and the programme also includes a number of lectures mainly related to recent scientific progress, hot topics in the national healthcare system, policies and certain economic aspects of cardiology. The annual autumn meeting is held in October or November with a one-day programme of scientific lectures related to recent progress, hot topics in the national health care system, policies and economical aspects of cardiology.

The DCS has a close relationship with the ESC, and became a member in June 1960, right after the creation of the DCS, as one of the founding countries. Automatic membership of the ESC is promoted actively to the DCS members.

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