

Zoom on: Dr Jannicke Mellin-Olsen



[Dr. Jannicke Mellin-Olsen, MD, DPH](#)

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Dr Jannicke Mellin-Olsen was the first female doctor in Norway to complete her (voluntary) military services, serving for the [UNIFIL Forces](#) in South Lebanon and has worked for the Red Cross in several counties. For ten years, she was the medical director for Europe, [Middle East and Africa for MedAire](#), Inc., and got involved in patient safety initiatives during her term in the [European Board of Anaesthesiology](#). She chaired [the Patient Safety and Quality Committee](#) before becoming president. Dr Mellin-Olsen was the driving force for the [Helsinki Declaration on Patient Safety in Anaesthesiology](#), launched in 2010, and has become the industry standard throughout the world.

What are your key areas of interest and research?

Patient Safety, Education and Health Politics. Patient Safety includes so many important aspects. What attracts me the most to this are the human factors, culture, communication, open disclosure and cooperation between all the major stakeholders, from politicians to patients and relatives, clinical staff, industry and managers. All parties depend on each other to provide safe medical care.

With education, I have worked a lot to harmonise it in Europe, and also to ensure that all patients in the world have access to safe anaesthesia. When it comes to health politics, healthcare will not work if the framework and political priorities do not match up with what is required to provide safe medical care. Clinicians do not operate in a vacuum.

What are the major challenges in your field?

That depends on whether I refer to my environment or globally. At home in Norway, it is the New Public Management concept, increasing bureaucracy and lack of confidence in doctors' motives. Clinicians often are suspected of having hidden agendas, and my impression is that some decision-makers misuse this. This may apply to a minority of practitioners, but the vast majority of us go to work every day to serve our patients by doing a good job. Far too often, decision-makers do not trust our competency in how to manage healthcare. We have the first-hand experience "on the floor saving lives", knowing what works and what does not.

Globally, the overarching problem in my field is that five out of seven billion people in the world lack access to safe, timely and affordable anaesthesia and surgery. Costing more than four times as many lives as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis combined. If we as anaesthesiologists, surgeons and obstetricians do not ensure that the politicians and policymakers know this, nobody will. We have calculated that if we want to have a bare minimum of five physician anaesthesiologists per 100,000 population (in the USA, there are more than 20/100,000), we would need 136,000 new anaesthesiologists today. There are shortages for all other health providers, and that is in a world in which illiteracy is a big problem. So, there is so much more work to be done.

What is your top management tip?

I have always said that if I feel that my boss wishes me well, I will go through fire and water for him or her. Vineet Nayar's book "Employees First, Customers Second" describes a successful way to motivate and empower employees to move the organisation forward. In my experience, many need more encouragement than one would think.

What would you single out as a career highlight?

There are several but driving the development of and launching the Helsinki Declaration on Patient Safety in Anaesthesiology in 2010 is undoubtedly near the top of my list.

If you had not chosen this career path you would have become a...?

I decided to become a doctor at the age of four, so there was no alternative. If I had to respond to the question, I would choose to be an investigative journalist or human rights champion.

What are your personal interests outside of work?

Running long distance in the forest, cross country skiing, travelling, and meeting people. I often say that if people travelled more, then there would be fewer wars in this world – we would realise that most people, irrespective of nationality and religion, basically want and need the same things: water, food, shelter, security, love and seeing their children grow and lead good peaceful lives.

Your favourite quote?

You cannot degrade others but yourself (Unknown).

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