

**Speech at the Ceremony for the STAMPAR Award
2nd European Public Health Conference
Andels Hotel, Lodz, Poland
November 27, 2009**

Friends and colleagues,

On behalf of Professor Guðjón Magnússon's widow Sigrún Gísladóttir and their three sons, it is a great honour for me to receive the ASPHER Stampar award given posthumously to him. For me and the public health community in Iceland, it is yet another illustration of the respect Prof Magnusson enjoyed in European public health circles. His sudden and unexpected death is a great loss for all of us who are committed to the cause of public health. He was throughout his career one of our most prominent leaders.

I am not going to repeat the excellent presentation by our former ASPHER president Jacek Sitko on Prof Magnusson's professional career. However, I would like to add a few words that may interest you.

Professor Magnússon was born on August 4, 1944. He is part of the first generation of Icelanders who were born in the Republic of Iceland, independent since June 17th that very same year. He was thus born in times when optimism prevailed for a future with great prospects. In this context, I find it particularly symbolic that he dedicated his life to public health.

In 1983, Professor Magnússon became the founder and chairman of the Icelandic arm of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Two years later, in 1985, he was part of its delegation that received the Nobel Peace price in Oslo, Norway – further evidence of Prof Magnússon's deep understanding, early in his career, of public health and its determinants.

Prof Magnússon's decision to join our School of Health and Education at Reykjavík University in 2007, after many years of life and work abroad, was a great boost for our work and common cause to strengthen public health in the country. He was respected by his students for his vast knowledge and experience. He was humble, a good listener and interested in people. All of us who knew him were attracted to seek his advice on professional as well as personal matters. His door was always open and he always had time to listen and share his opinion. His pleasant and kind manner and ability to listen helped in finding practical solutions to every problem. No one I know understood the Icelandic health system as well as he or had a better vision for its future development. The same applies to his understanding of health service delivery in other countries, something I experienced myself during our work to strengthen the health care services in Malawi in support of work by the Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) in the area.

Professor Magnússon was convinced that basic understanding of public health principles was a fundamental prerequisite to becoming a good leader within the health services. Thus, when he joined the School of Health and Education at Reykjavík University he was active in the establishment of a new masters course in public health for leading health care providers, called MPH-Executive. This 2-year programme is on-going and the first 18 students, with diverse backgrounds, will graduate this coming summer. The programme is run in collaboration with reknown institutions from both sides of the Atlantic (e.g. from Columbia University in New

York, Mayo Clinic in Rochester, McGill University in Montreal and Nordic School of Public Health in Gothenburg). The commitment of all those involved in this programme, students and teachers alike, is a great testimony to the ability of Professor Magnússon to unite people in a common goal. All our collaborators have declared that they are willing to continue this collaboration in the spirit laid out by Professor Magnússon.

It is indeed an honour to be here today. The respect of the ASPHER community for Prof Magnusson by awarding him post-humously the STAMPAR award is a great encouragement to all of us in the Icelandic public health community. The memory of Professor Magnusson will live with us who knew him, and give us inspiration to continue to work for the cause of public health he so much believed in.

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