

Dear Editor,

POSTGRADUATE DEGREE IN SPORTS MEDICINE IN FINLAND

After a planning process of five years sports medicine is now a medical specialist postgraduate degree of its own in Finland. The education and training programmes are available and the first degrees have been granted. The curriculum follows the general Finnish formula for medical postgraduate education with some special features.

Some kind of organised medical care of sportsmen has been available in Finland since 1930's. The wars caused a long delay in this development. In 1959, the first formal suggestion to establish a speciality in sports medicine was made but this was not successful. Two sports medical care units (in Helsinki and Turku) with minimal full-time personnel (physician and nurse) were, however, established.

In 1972, the Finnish Parliament passed new legislation on public health. For the first time health promotion was accepted as one of the official aims of the health care system. The services of the primary care were rapidly developed. Major programmes on community level intervention were started as research projects. The poor fitness and common problem of overweight in middle aged people were understood as risk factors. The Kuopio Research Institute of Exercise Medicine started its operation in Eastern Finland, an area which has one of the highest statistics of morbidity and mortality due to cardiovascular diseases in the world. In 1981 this Institute organised together with the University of Kuopio, Sports Medical Association and the Finnish Physiological Society a Puijo Symposium on education and training in sports and exercise medicine. After the Symposium a detailed plan was prepared. The Finnish Olympic Committee, Foundation of Sports Medicine, Sports Medical Association and the Finnish Physiological Society submitted the documents to the National Board of Health with a wish that plan should be realised as soon as possible. The National Board of Health assigned two working groups to examine the plan and, with some modifications, it was accepted. To emphasise the importance of the fitness and health promotion, the name of the speciality in Finnish is "liikuntaläketiede", "motion medicine". The word "sports" in Finnish language is closely associated with competitive sports. In January 1985 the Finnish Government passed the degree on the speciality. Universities were asked to prepare the programmes. The National Board of Health has granted the first specialist degrees to eight persons who will act for supervisors of the education and training.

In Finland medical education takes at least six years to pass the curriculum in any of the five medical schools. The specialist education and training lasts an additional six years. It consists of one year of so-called general training, four years of specialist training and one year of advanced specialist studies. The curriculum contains a number of formal courses and studying of given textbooks and journals. The trainees must also pass a national examination. For sports ("motion") medicine a complete programme is now available in the Universities of Kuopio, Oulu and Tampere. The general training in sports medicine can be performed in departments of physical medicine, surgery, clinical physiology, clinical neurophysiology, paediatrics, psychiatry, radiology, internal medicine or in

general practice or in the non-clinical departments of medical faculties.

Three years of the specialist training must be performed in a sports medical unit. Training residences are available in Jyväskylä, Kuopio, Oulu, Tampere and Turku which all have their own units. The Universities of Jyväskylä and Kuopio offer university assistant posts for one year in training, provided the trainees participate in the work in sports medical units.

During their residency, the trainees learn the methods of health and fitness examination and diagnostics, care and rehabilitation of the diseases and traumas of the locomotor system. They must also learn to master the problems of sports training, act as team physician, run medical care during competitions and perform doping control. They must practise research, contribute to running of courses and distribution of information to the public. During the training programme the residents participate in meetings and various courses. The courses are arranged in biomechanics and kinesiology, endocrinology, epidemiology, fitness programmes for special groups, health education, laboratory diagnostics, nutrition, orthopaedics and sports traumatology, sports organisations and rules of sports events, sports physiology, sports sociology and psychology, training for sports, training of children and youth. Furthermore, they must follow 20 hours teaching of planning and administration of health care.

To complete the programme the trainees must serve three month periods in the departments of physical medicine, surgery, clinical physiology, clinical chemistry, paediatrics, neurology, psychiatry and internal medicine. Furthermore, it has been stated that the training must include working in a hospital for a minimum of one year and at least 6 months of this in the department of surgery.

For the national examination five books on sports medicine are required. International journals (8-9) should be followed during the training. The written examination is organised by nominated evaluators in all universities having the curriculum in sports medicine.

The minimum need for specialists in sports medicine has been estimated to amount to 30-40 in the foreseeable future. This goal may be reached by the year 2000. A number of municipalities and sports institutes would like to provide sports medical services. Furthermore, universities, research institutes and army have a number of suitable jobs. The specialists can provide only a fraction of the services required at present and in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the continuing education of health care personnel in special courses and through the Journal of Finnish Sports and Exercise Medicine are most necessary.

Yours faithfully,

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