Insight into the Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities and Health Care delivery in Finland

Interview with Risto Miettunen, IHF Governing Council Member

Organization and position
As CEO of Kuopio University Hospital District for seven years now, I am responsible for the overall management, reporting to the Board of Directors (nominated by political parties and local municipalities, and the University of Eastern Finland). I am in charge of the preparation and implementation of strategies approved by the board, ensuring quality care and service delivery, education and research. I also represent the hospital district in public.

I am an internationally experienced senior leader with more than 20 years in management. I have also held high-level positions in the pharmaceutical and medical engineering industries. I started my career as a medical doctor and radiologist, and I hold a Dr. Med. Sc. degree from Helsinki University, Finland.

I transitioned to healthcare management in 2009 after nearly a decade in European and global medical engineering and pharmaceutical industries between 1995 and 2004 as Vice President and President. My experience also includes running my own European-wide consultancy in clinical audits, operational excellence projects, and venture capital between 2004 and 2009.

Kuopio University Hospital is the academic and acute tertiary level medical center for Eastern and Central Finland as one out of five in Finland, covering a population of ca. 850,000 in that role. The hospital also provides secondary and to some extent primary care services.

Interview with Hanna Tainio, Deputy Managing Director of the Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities, IHF Full Member

My name is Hanna Tainio and I have been working as a Deputy Managing Director in the Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities for three years. The Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities is a powerful advocate for all Finnish municipalities and it promotes local self-government and the modernization of municipal services. All Finnish municipalities, in total 310, are members of the Association. The Association’s core tasks are to advance the interests and development of municipalities and their partner organizations and to provide services for them.

Before my present position in the Association I worked over 30 years as a surgeon, urologist and head medical adviser in the University Hospital of Tampere and at Tampere University. At the same time, I was in politics as a member of the municipal and regional councils and boards in the city of Tampere and Pirkanmaa region. I was also an MP for a four-year period and a member of the social affairs and health committee at the parliament of Finland. So, I have seen the field of the Finnish healthcare from different sides.
Key challenges and accomplishment for service delivery in Finland

Municipal social welfare and health care services, implemented with government support, form the basis of the social welfare and health care system. Private companies also provide services alongside the public sector. In addition, Finland has a wide range of social welfare and health care organizations, providing services both free of charge and for a fee.

In the Finnish social and welfare reform anticipated to launch in 2021, integration of healthcare and social welfare services means that all services will be under the management of a single structure, the county. The counties will be responsible for coordinating the services and forming effective service and care chains. This will apply to all public healthcare and social welfare services, both at primary and specialized level. All financing will also go through the county to service providers. The county will have the duty to ensure that public, private and third sector services within the scope of the clients’ freedom of choice work together, information flows smoothly, and the services meet quality criteria. (Source: the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health)

At present, the key challenges of Finnish Healthcare are ageing population, increasing socioeconomic and health inequalities and accumulation of social and health problems. Ageing increases the need for services due to multimorbidity. We also have difficulties in service delivery and long waiting times especially in primary health care. This is due to the inability of small municipalities to ensure enough funding on one hand and difficulties in recruiting doctors in remote areas in Eastern and Northern Finland on the other hand.

It has been shown e.g. in the city of Oulu that 10 % of the population cause about 80 % of social and health care costs. Integration of social and health services in the social and health care reform would serve the needs of these population groups.

Key challenges and perspectives in healthcare at the international level

Inequity in access to services, the determinants of disease including social factors, and prevention should be addressed on a systems level. On the other hand, personalized medicine, digitalization and data management are powerful tools for future healthcare.

Expectations from IHF

Risto Miettunen has been an active member since 2011, joining the IHF Governing Council in 2013, moving on to become Treasurer and Member of the Executive Committee in 2015, and holding the Chair of the IHF University Hospitals Special Interest Group in 2015-2017. He will be the next incoming President for 2019-2021. In IHF he represents the Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities.

It has been a most rewarding journey for Mr. Miettunen, and he has high expectations that IHF will develop and maintain a significant and high impact role in tomorrow’s healthcare.

The Finnish Association of Local and Regional Authorities would like IHF to serve as an international forum for the development of not only hospitals but health care as a whole. They are interested in the effects of digitalization of health care services and whether digitalization improves patient experience, treatment quality and efficiency. In addition, its effects on health care resources and costs could be analyzed internationally. The Association also values the possibilities for international benchmarking of e.g. hospital quality and patient safety.

Evolution of the IHF in the next five years

As President Designate and later President, Mr. Miettunen would drive IHF towards an enlarged membership globally. The development of networks would also be at the forefront of his activities, especially including organizations such as WHO and OECD, and corporate partnerships. “We need to make IHF more attractive to the membership, as an exchange and knowledge sharing platform, internationally and actively communicating with and between peers. This needs to be understood in the context of a changing global situation and environment in healthcare. We appreciate diversity and work on a global scale to aim at reaching equity in health care services on population level. This also means a paradigm shift from hospitals alone to a systems approach”, he said.
Healthcare highlights in Finland: the result of clinics' work in prenatal and child healthcare

The foundation of the Finnish health system is municipal public health work. Along with disease management, health centers offer a large scale of preventive services. These include e.g. guidance in health matters, public health education, breast cancer and cervical cancer screenings, vaccinations, and above all maternity and child health clinics. These clinics have been developed since the 1920’s.

The prenatal and child healthcare

The services of prenatal and child health clinics are available all over the country, free of charge, and practically all families are using them. The clinics have had an important role in preventing infections, screening for diseases and preventing children's accidents. They cooperate closely with the hospitals to ensure specialist care whenever needed.

As a result of the work in the prenatal and child health clinics, the maternal mortality rate is extremely low (3 per 100 000), the infant mortality rate is among the lowest in the world (3 - 4 per 1000) and the vaccination coverage for small children is 95 %.

The role and mission of the Full Member

The right to social welfare and health services is a basic and fundamental right of the whole population. Public health centers (143 health centers in 2017) providing primary care are run by municipalities or joint municipal authorities, and hospitals are mainly run by 20 hospital districts (joint municipal authorities). Social welfare and health care is the most extensive local government function.

The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities is the representative of municipal healthcare providers. The Association brings the voice of municipalities and the entire local government sector to social debate and decision-making. The Association’s core tasks are to advance the interests and development of municipalities and their partner organisations and to provide services for them. The Association has multidisciplinary competence and a broad understanding of all aspects of local government work. It employs a staff of about 230 people, who are mostly in expert positions. The main office, the House of Municipalities, is located in Helsinki.