

## International Federation of Hard of Hearing People 9th World Congress



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### From the Executive Director's Desk

I was privileged to represent HLAA and present at the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH) 9th World Congress in Bergen, Norway, June 25-28, 2012. The Congress was hosted by the Norwegian Association of Hard of Hearing People and held at the Grieghallen (named after the famous Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg) in downtown Bergen.

Four hundred people from 40 countries came together for a conference with the theme "A Better Quality of Life for Hard of Hearing People." There were 15 representatives from the U.S. attending. The Congress was conducted in English with Norwegian CART. A contingent from Japan brought their own interpreters and CART reporters.

Two attendees from Estonia and Vietnam came on the scholarship fund set up in memory of Marcia Dugan, past president of IFHOH and HLAA.

At the evening Opening Ceremony we were regaled by violin music and beautiful songs sung by Kjensting Anthun. Knut Ellingsen, president of the Norwegian Hard of Hearing Association and Ruth Warick, president of IFHOH, gave the opening remarks. Founded in 1977, IFHOH is celebrating its 35th anniversary. It has members in Asia, Africa, Australia, North America and

Europe. Ruth noted that the World Health Organization estimates that there are 278 million people with hearing loss worldwide. Knut described the Norwegian Hard of Hearing Association as having 54,000 members, 200 local clubs, and 500 volunteers. Their priorities are advocating for laws on discrimination and access and subtitling for movies and TV. After the official opening, the deputy mayor of Bergen, Tor Woldseth, invited everyone to mingle at a reception with light food and drinks.

The educational program was started with the first plenary session by Anne-Grete Strom-Erichsen, the Norwegian Minister of Health. She was a member of Parliament in 2005 and a former mayor of Bergen. She talked about the need for more focus on chronic conditions, strengthening service coordination and defining more clearly, patient participation. In 2008 Norway instituted infant hearing screening. Forty deaf children are born each year in Norway and 95 percent are offered cochlear implants. There are 500 children who have been implanted up to now. Norway is proud that their survival rates following heart failure and cancer are the best in the world. Their latest

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Bergen, Norway

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campaign "In Safe Hands" is to improve patient safety.

Each day there were two plenary sessions, morning and afternoon, followed by three simultaneous workshop tracks. In between was the opportunity to visit the 14 exhibit booths.

Workshops addressed issues of importance to children, youth and seniors with a range of topics covering research, aging and hearing loss, and recent developments in technology, emergency preparedness, career choice and medical conditions affecting hearing, acoustics, rehabilitation, education and many others.

Jo Matsuzaki, professor at Miyagi University in Japan, showed a strikingly graphic video of the earthquake and tsunami that hit March 11, 2011 in which 15,858 Japanese people died and 3,021 were missing. The tsunami reached a height of 10 meters and Professor Matsuzaki talked about the barriers to emergency preparedness for people with hearing loss in such circumstances.

There is no time or space here to go into detail about the excellent program. Stay tuned for Congress presenters to post their workshop PowerPoint presentations and abstracts on the IFHOH website at [www.ifhoh.org](http://www.ifhoh.org).

Snippets of information gleaned:

- People with multiple sclerosis have more trouble hearing in noise
- FM frequencies: H band in Europe 169-176 MHz; N band in North

America and Taiwan 216-217 MHz

- In 1878 Siemens made hearing aids but gave only to their employees; started to sell hearing aids to the public in 1910
- Norwegian children choose a vocational or academic track at 15 years of age

Research from Denmark:

- found that hearing loss is common in hip fracture patients; number of falls in older people decreased when hearing loss treated
- of Danes older than 50 years of age who are employed, 42 percent did not tell their supervisors about their hearing loss and 14 percent did not tell their colleagues
- life challenges of young adults—the most difficult challenge is small talk

The Congress closed with a delicious dinner during the recognition banquet which gave everyone a chance to relax and socialize before returning home. Norway is a small, beautiful country with fjords, waterfalls, forests, moose, reindeer, Aquavit and very warm people. The summer nights were light until midnight, fresh fish and seafood were plentiful, the temperature cool and the city surrounded by clear water and boats.

Thanks to everyone who made the Congress and our time in Norway such a memorable occasion. 

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