

ACTIVITY REPORT FOR THE NORDIC NETWORK FOR PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE AND MEDICAL ETHICS 2009–2011 (Nordforsk ref nr 080147)

Workshops and courses

The activities of the network have to a large extent been concentrated on workshops and postgraduate courses and they have taken place in most of the Nordic and Baltic countries involved. The main events have been the following:

Opening symposium, Linköping, Sweden, 4–6 March 2009. The organiser was Professor Lennart Nordenfelt, Dept of Medical and Health Sciences, Linköping University. On this occasion the activities of the network were planned and a general symposium was held under four headings: general philosophy of medicine, research ethics, medicine and the welfare state, and biotechnology. A substantial part of the meeting was also dedicated to presentations of the activities in philosophy of medicine within the participating countries. Summaries of these presentations are to be found on the network website. There were 40 participants (all connected to the network). Fifteen of them were postgraduate students. All countries except Latvia were represented.

Experimental philosophy and experimental medical philosophy, Copenhagen, 4–6 June 2010. The organiser was Dr Peter Rossel, Unit of Medical Philosophy and Clinical Theory, Copenhagen. The lecturers were prominent researchers from both overseas and the Nordic countries. There were 47 participants. Twenty of them were network members, and ten of these were postgraduate students. All countries except Norway were represented. The workshop was presented in the following way:

“The experimental approach to philosophical concepts and problems is a recent, flourishing approach known as experimental philosophy, or for short X-phi. Using controlled and systematic experiments it explores folk intuitions and concepts in respect of e.g. *free will and responsibility* or *intentional action*. At the workshop some of the “classic” studies will be presented and we will explore how the experimental approach can be extended to topics of specific interest within medical philosophy, e.g. personal responsibility for health and concepts of disease.”

Research Ethics, Skalholt, Iceland, 19–22 September 2010. This was a combined workshop and postgraduate course, organised by Professor Vilhjalmur Arnason, Department of Philosophy and Centre for Ethics, University of Iceland. The lecturers were American and Nordic researchers. There were 27 participants, 18 of whom were postgraduate or Master’s students. Some 15 persons represented the network. All countries except Latvia were represented. The workshop and the course (2ECTS) focused on philosophical and ethical issues in research, such as research methodology, scientific misconduct, and ethical issues in research in developing countries.

Knowledge in medicine – questions in medical epistemology, Helsinki, Finland, 9–11 June 2011. This was a combined workshop and postgraduate course, organised by Dr Pekka Louhiala, Hjelt Institute, University of Helsinki, in cooperation with the Finnish Society for Philosophy of Medicine. The lecturers were researchers from Finland and from overseas.

Contributions were also made by four senior members of the network. There were 34 participants (18 female, 16 male). Eighteen of them were postgraduate students. Twelve were members of the network. All countries except Denmark were represented. The course was described in the following way:

“Is medicine a science or does it rather belong to the humanities? Or is it a discipline in its own right? What is the nature of knowledge in medicine? How does medicine develop? These and related questions are discussed in the seminar/PhD-course ‘Knowledge in Medicine — Questions in Medical Epistemology’.”

Closing symposium, Vilnius, Lithuania, 5–7 October 2011. The organiser was Professor Eugenijus Gefenas, Dept of Medical Ethics, Vilnius University. The symposium was conducted under the following four headings: philosophy of medicine, clinical ethics, social aspects of health care, research ethics. There were 38 participants, 14 of whom were postgraduate students. All were members of the network and all countries included in the network were represented. During the symposium presentations of the ongoing activities in the participating countries were made and the future of the collaborations initiated within the network was discussed. See below.

Extra symposium on ‘Medical philosophy and medical ethics in the Nordic and the Baltic countries — some pressing issues’, Tartu, Estonia, 10–12 June 2012. The organiser was Professor Margit Sutrop, Dept of Medical Ethics, Tartu University. The workshop dealt with a great number of issues on which research is currently being conducted in the Nordic and Baltic countries. These include theoretical philosophy of medicine, research ethics, the doctor-patient relationship and general bioethics. The intention was to use the workshop as a platform for the planning of cooperative research on the issues in question. There were 24 participants, 10 of whom were postgraduate students. All countries except Denmark were represented.

What made it possible to hold this extra symposium was that some of the *Nordforsk* funds had been saved from an earlier year and the network was given permission to use them after the official network period. The Helsinki symposium had been much cheaper than expected thanks to external sponsorship.

The planned course and workshop on *Justice of access to genetic technology*, scheduled for 22–25 November 2010 in Oslo, Norway, unfortunately had to be cancelled because there were too few registrations.

Additional workshops and symposia

In addition to the workshops and courses directly organised within the framework of the network, several other workshops and symposia on issues relevant to philosophy of medicine have been conducted in the Nordic and Baltic countries. In some of these, members of the network have played a crucial part. Examples of such events are the following:

Health, Agency and Life Choices, November 2009, international conference organised by the Dept of Medical and Health Sciences, Linköping University, Sweden.

Euthanasia in Humans and Animals, March 2010, PhD course organised by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Skara, Sweden, and the Dept of Medical and Health Sciences, Linköping University, Sweden.

From Informed Consent to No Consent? The Challenges of New Ethical Frameworks, November 2010, workshop organised by the Dept of Medical Ethics, Tartu University, Estonia.

Feminist Phenomenology and Medicine, organised by the Gender and Health Research Network (based at Linköping University) together with GenNa (Uppsala University), 18–21 May 2011. The Gender and Health Research Network is funded by *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*.

The Body as Gift, Resource and Commodity, 5–6 May 2011. International conference organised by the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge at Södertörn University College, Sweden. This conference was the culmination of a research project “The Body as Gift, Resource and Commodity: Organ Transplantation in the Baltic Sea Region” run 2008–2011, headed by Fredrik Svenaeus and including from the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge also Martin Gunnarson and Ulla Ekström von Essen. This was a collaborative project with researchers from Lund University and the University of Latvia in Riga.

Exchange of research students and postdocs

The network has announced and offered individual scholarships for postgraduate students and postdoc researchers who wish to spend a short time for research in another Nordic or Baltic country. Five postgraduate students and two postdocs (during 2009 and 2010) have used this opportunity, mainly for participating in courses outside the network’s own repertoire. In one of these cases systematic research collaboration has been initiated. Dr Henrik Lerner, Linköping, and Professor Björn Hofmann, Oslo, have initiated a project investigating conceptual relationships between human and veterinary medicine. A first result is the article “A comparison of the meanings of concepts used in veterinary medicine and human medicine” which has been published in the journal *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 2011.

It appears that during 2011 the postgraduate students of the network preferred to participate in our regular conferences rather than organise their own research collaboration.

Achievements in relation to our application for a *Nordforsk* network

In our application to *Nordforsk* in 2008 we listed a number of aims for the proposed network and these aims will here be set against the outcomes as we can now perceive them.

1. *Secure the cooperation initiated in the network for the future either through the Nordic/Baltic society or a continued network*

This issue was seriously discussed during the two last network meetings in Vilnius and Tartu. All the participants emphasised the value of the cooperation that has been initiated and they all agreed that the cooperation must continue. Two alternatives were discussed: (1) the creation of a full-blown society on a par with the European Society for Philosophy of Medicine and Medical Ethics, which has statutes and formal membership including fees; (2) continuing with an informal network without statutes or membership fees but with an executive committee that guarantees the existence of the network and the planning of scientific activities. A decision was taken in Vilnius, and confirmed in Tartu, in support of the

second alternative. An executive committee for a continued informal network for the philosophy of medicine and medical ethics was elected. Professor Vilhjalmur Arnason, Reykjavik, was elected as chairman of this committee, Dr Henrik Lerner, Linköping, as secretary and Drs Kadri Simm, Tartu, and Pekka Louhiala, Helsinki, as further members.

2. *Increase the number of published peer-reviewed articles and books in the field*

This target has been achieved with good measure. There is a very large production of peer-reviewed articles and books by senior members of the network, also an increasingly large production by junior members. This is attested by the list of publications attached to the present report (and the list represents only a limited selection of the total volume of publications). Many of our scholars also publish in national periodicals and contribute to debates in newspapers concerning topics related to medical ethics.

It can be noted that four members of the network (Vilhjalmur Arnason, Lennart Nordenfelt, Eugenijus Gefenas and Fredrik Svenaeus) have contributed to the *Encyclopedia for Applied Ethics* published by Elsevier, that four members of the network (Vilhjalmur Arnason, Björn Hofmann, Peter Rossel and Lennart Nordenfelt) have contributed to the volume *Philosophy of Medicine, 5 questions*, published by Automatic Press, and that several members will be contributing to the *Handbook for the Philosophy of Medicine* to be published by Springer.

Certainly the considerable output of publications is not attributable only to the network, nevertheless the network has provided a significant impetus. Certain papers presented at the network meetings have received international publication, and some of them have thereby attracted considerable attention in the international arena.

In order to increase international publication especially for the younger members of the network, an invitation was launched during the last workshop in Tartu to all the members of the network to contribute articles to a special volume of *Studia Philosophica Estonica* under the title *Medical Philosophy and Medical Ethics in the Nordic and Baltic countries — Some Pressing Issues*. Kadri Simm, Tartu, and Henrik Lerner, Linköping, will act as editors.

3. *Discuss and improve the research methodology in projects on philosophy of medicine*

Research methodology was particularly discussed during those meetings which also functioned as courses for postgraduate students. Methodological questions were much in focus during the Icelandic course on research ethics and the Finnish course on knowledge in medicine. In the Icelandic case there was a round-table discussion involving all senior participants and the postgraduate students on the issue of improving their research methodology also with regard to research-ethical questions.

4. *Increase the number of joint research projects in the field in the Nordic/Baltic countries*

At the extra symposium (June 2012) in Tartu considerable time was spent on discussing forthcoming joint research projects. The network members who participated agreed finally to focus on four topics for which further funding should be sought. Four workgroups were established, containing a majority of the members present, who will initiate collaborative

work on the topics (presented below) and invite further members to participate when the structure of the projects has become more explicit.

The topics established for further research cooperation are the following:

1. Truth-telling

Initiate research on the issue of truth-telling in clinical communication, in particular in connection with serious diseases or other tragic circumstances. Provide guidelines for the inclusion of these matters in the education of health-care personnel. Person responsible for this project: Dr Vents Silis, Riga.

2. Return of results

Discuss the ethics of information in respect of results from two specific areas of research: 1) biobanking and 2) genetic research. The issues include the development of policy recommendations. Person responsible for this project: Senior researcher Kadri Simm, Tartu.

3. Complementary medicine (CAM)

Analyse the status of complementary medicine today. Trace the relations between CAM and school medicine. Person responsible for this project: Dr Pekka Louhiala, Helsinki.

4. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Analyse the condition of ADHD from conceptual, phenomenological and ethical points of view. Focus on whether ADHD is a disease and how it should be treated. Person responsible for this project: Dr Petra Gelhaus, Linköping.

5. *Increase the number of postgraduate students in Philosophy of Medicine and Medical Ethics (PMME) in the Nordic and Baltic countries*

This issue was highlighted on a number of occasions during the existence of the network but no specific measures have so far been taken. The position of PMME varies greatly, from a financial and organisational point of view, in the different countries. This means that concrete proposals regarding intake of postgraduate students must be made on a national basis. It is evident, however, that the existence of the network, together with its output, is of the utmost importance for the general status of PMME in the Nordic and Baltic countries and thereby indirectly for the willingness of relevant institutions to accept new postgraduate students.

Linköping in August 2012

Lennart Nordenfelt
Network coordinator