

Preface

Dear Participants,

Integration of health and social services is a dominant feature in many national, regional and local reforms. Entire health and social care systems are being reformed in many countries in Europe and elsewhere. In Finland, local authorities, municipalities are responsible for organising health and social services to citizens. We have just restructured municipalities fairly radically and cut down their number by around a quarter in few years. Now, we are gradually moving to the next stage of the reform process and start to restructure our health and social services by promoting deeper integration of care.

Often integration appears a modern panacea to several topical problems. It is maintained to secure sustainable financing of health and social services in ageing societies, as well as to improve efficiency in service delivery. Yet there is little research evidence on how effective and feasible instrument integration is in different societal and cultural settings and how it affects stakeholders.

In Finland, we see increasing administrative and functional integration of health and social services at local and regional level. Social services and primary care have started to cooperate actively and barriers between primary care and hospital care are becoming lower.

The aim of integration is to provide wide range of timely services to patients, to create service chains that are seamless and flexible to patients and to treat individuals respecting their body and soul.

The goals, ambitions and expectations for integrated care are set high. Practical experience is piling up, but there is less researched evidence on costs, benefits and un-aimed side effects, emerging new problems and challenges of integrated care. Yet we need to know how and why some variants of integrated care function as expected and why some models do not. There is clearly a great need for comparative health and social services research which could help decision-makers to adopt best integrated care models to implement.

While it is rarely possible to directly adopt and implement models that are deemed viable in other countries it is important to analyse and understand differences and similarities of the integrated care models applied in different contexts.

The 10th International Conference on Integrated Care in Tampere provides an excellent opportunity to exchange research results and ideas with colleagues. There is increasing quest for cost-effective models of integrated care that would bring marked benefits to patients, and at the same time ensure sustainable future for health and social services.

I wish you all enjoyable and rewarding discussions and networking In Tampere INIC conference.

Markku Pekurinen,
*Director, Department of Health and Social Services,
National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland*