

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of
Iceland, at the 22nd European Network of Physiotherapy in
Higher Education (ENPHE) Conference.**

**Radisson Hotel Saga, 2nd floor, Katla I & II, Friday 22
September 2017, 9 am.**

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to you all. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the University of Iceland, and it is an honour to open the 2017 European Network of Physiotherapy in Higher Education, ENPHE, Conference.

The conference programme this year is both extensive and ambitious, comprising keynote speeches, panel discussions, presentations, working groups, student workshops, poster sessions, a visit to the Icelandic company Össur, social events, and the concluding conference dinner.

We are almost on the Campus of the University of Iceland. I would like to take this opportunity and tell you a bit about the University. The University of

Iceland was established in 1911 and, just over a century ago. The University started its operations with four faculties and 45 students in the House of Parliament in downtown Reykjavik. The University has evolved through the years and is now a comprehensive international research university with five schools, 25 faculties and around 13000 students. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, master and PhD degrees, in all faculties. The University of Iceland is ranked by the Times Higher World University Rankings in the top 250 and is also ranked by Shanghai rankings in the bracket 401-500. Health sciences is one of the strongest areas of the University of Iceland.

It seems fitting that the ENPHE conference is held at the University of Iceland this year; the first university in Europe to establish a programme for physiotherapy at the university level, back in 1976. By offering a 4-year Bachelor of Science programme in Physiotherapy, the University of Iceland's Department of Physiotherapy took on a leading role in Europe in

this field. This decision proved highly beneficial for health sciences at the University of Iceland in general and the Icelandic healthcare system. Of course, today, physiotherapy is widely taught at the university level in Europe.

A solid and trusted education allows physiotherapists to make a valuable contribution to health care services. It is, moreover, a necessary prerequisite for clinical or academic postgraduate studies.

During the 41 years since it was first offered at the university level, the field of physiotherapy has evolved and changed. The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) has reiterated again and again that physiotherapy is an industry which changes according to the medical and social needs of each nation. The spread of various lifestyle diseases and a change in the age structure of Western countries have led to an increased demand for ways to promote health for each and all. Physiotherapists play a vital role in this context, as their education aims to help their clients

maintain and improve their movement and functional abilities.

The WCPT has changed the minimum requirements regarding the knowledge, skills, and competences which physiotherapists are required to have at the end of their studies. To receive professional recognition, the organisation expects the duration of a physiotherapy programme to be no less than four years. Moreover, physiotherapists must be able to work in different areas within the healthcare system as well as in different geographical areas, such as rural and urban. The requirements of the WCPT are focussed on the core principles of client-centred treatment, increased knowledge of research, and evidence-based practice. Every university offering physiotherapy as a programme needs to encourage students to regard continuing education as an indispensable and essential part of their work. The work of physiotherapists is considered a specialised autonomous profession, which is something that was recognized in Iceland in the new Healthcare

Practitioners Act, entered into force January, 1st 2013.

As a result of the increased professional responsibility and increasingly diverse field of work, the Department of Physiotherapy at the University of Iceland has restructured its programme, keeping society's changing needs and the requirements of health sciences in mind.

The guidelines of the Bologna Declaration have not only been implemented here at the University of Iceland, but also in other European countries. As a result, more and more countries—including Belgium, the Netherlands and Poland—now require a Master of Science degree to achieve professional recognition. The increased quality of study programmes, allows European physiotherapists to pursue postgraduate education worldwide. Moreover, it promotes and boosts physical therapy research and international research collaborations.

Ladies and gentlemen. Let me not delay you from the excellent programme ahead. For our foreign guests, I

sincerely hope that you experience an enjoyable stay in Iceland, scientifically, culturally and socially and that you will return home with fond memories. The weather in Iceland is always a topic of discussion here. Whatever happens, always consider it refreshing!

Enjoy the conference.