

**Address by Jón Atli Benediktsson, Rector of the University of
Iceland, at the opening of the congress on motion sickness.**

Held in Akureyri, Monday 8 July 2019, 8.30 am

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the University of Iceland, I would like to welcome you all to this congress on motion sickness, held in connection with the 15th European Society for Clinical Evaluation of Balance Disorders Meeting.

Iceland is an island in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean and ever since the original settlement over eleven centuries ago, its inhabitants have relied on boats – for communication, transportation of goods and, last but not least, for fishing, which remains to this day the bedrock of the Icelandic economy. Sea voyages have always been a big part of life in Iceland and Icelandic sailors have become experts at managing the North Atlantic waters. Nevertheless, the rough waves around Iceland have taken a huge toll through the centuries, both on property and human life. Fortunately, accidents at sea have been greatly reduced in recent decades, thanks not least to improved vessels, more accurate shipping forecasts, better training for sailors, improved safety equipment and better organised lifeboat services. Despite a long history of living in close proximity with the sea, sea sickness has always plagued Icelandic sailors. For a long time,

however, the phenomenon was not given much attention, seen as an unavoidable part of being at sea. This attitude has changed considerably in recent years, thanks not least to more research within the health sciences and the development of treatments and training methods to combat motion sickness. There has been somewhat of an awakening on this issue, and people now increasingly understand that sea sickness is neither a personal weakness nor the inescapable fate of sailors.

All healthy people suffer from motion sickness if subjected to motion that is forceful enough or which lasts long enough. It is also important to realise that although we talk about 'motion sickness', it is not an actual sickness. It is more accurate to say that motion sickness is a natural response in a healthy individual to an unnatural environment, such as aboard a vessel on the sea in rough weather. It is believed that 90% of all sailors will experience sea sickness at some point.

People have also come to realise that a significant proportion of accidents at sea through the ages can doubtless be attributed to sea sickness. And the sea will continue to play an important role for Icelanders, perhaps an even more important role with climate change and the opening of new sea routes in the northern regions. It is safe to say that few areas of the health sciences have such a practical value

for an island nation like Iceland as research into motion sickness and development of new training methods and treatments. Indeed, there is much to indicate that improved knowledge of motion sickness will have a wider application than just sea sickness – for example in the development of all kinds of virtual reality solutions in the world of computer science, self-driving cars, space travel and sport. The use of virtual reality, which can induce motion sickness through visual stimulation alone, i.e., the person sits still and therefore motion in the inner ear is not involved, is opening new opportunities for research, including the possibility of training people to manage motion sickness by speeding up the adjustment to a moving environment. The title of this congress is therefore very fitting: "Survival in a moving environment". Research equipment in the field of motion sickness has also advanced. An example will be on display for the duration of the congress and the possibilities it opens will be discussed in the lectures.

Ladies and gentlemen. Ahead of us is a fascinating conference with a wide range of topics presented by first-rate scientists from around the globe. It is immensely gratifying that this conference is being held here in Iceland and hopefully it will help to strengthen the research being conducted in this important field. We plan in the future to establish a research centre for motion sickness at the University of

Iceland, in collaboration with domestic and international universities and research centres.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to end by thanking those involved in organising this congress for their excellent work. In particular I wish to thank Hannes Petersen, professor at the University of Iceland and president of the congress, for his important contribution. With that said, I hereby declare this congress on motion sickness open. I hope you find it edifying and enjoyable. Last but not least, I hope that you are able to take a break from the science and find the time to enjoy your visit and see a little of our beautiful country.

Thank you.