

Competitiveness Forum 2009 15th - 16th June, 2009
Hämeenlinna, Finland
Katriina Laaksonen: Opening words

Thank you for the invitation! On behalf of the regional council of Häme, I have the honour and the pleasure to give the opening words for this forum.

The forum theme "Diversity in Wellbeing – The Right to Good Life" has been and will maintain very close to me. Over 20 years, I have been promoting people's wellbeing in different settings. During the past couple of years, I have also tried to raise up these questions in political decision-making. Because of my background as a nurse, I am more familiar with the concept of health, which in fact is very close to the concept of wellbeing.

In nursing science, the concept of health can be defined by six dimensions:

1. Physical health can be estimated by measuring body functions.
2. Psychological health can be defined as one's ability to use personal resources.
3. Social health or wellbeing means that one has both ability and resources to act in all social roles in one's life.
4. Sexual health means acceptance of one's sexuality and ability to get satisfaction.
5. Spiritual health means having a balance between recognized moral principles and beliefs.
6. Emotional health is the ability to express feelings, to be an active partner in a group. It also includes communication skills, responsibility and tolerance.

People's wellbeing can be and needs to be seen simultaneously as wellbeing of an individual, of his family and the whole community surrounding him. Wellbeing differs also depending on your age.

As we all see, the six dimensions of health can be used within the concept of wellbeing also.

All those dimensions are present all the time. And most of the decisions that influence wellbeing are made somewhere else than in the healthcare or the social welfare sector. Decision-making in all sectors should include an evaluation on how they effect on wellbeing. This should include education, traffic and security, physical surroundings, infrastructure, public services, fresh water – everything.

We experience a very special situation with the current global economic crisis. This difficult time underlines the importance of evaluation.

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Already in the beginning of 1990, it was declared that the different socioeconomic groups of the Finnish people will have equal health status and will have equal opportunities to maintain and promote their health. Unfortunately, the recent surveys have shown quite opposite trends.

Reasons for that are many. One of them, I believe, is the fact that we have worked too much on our specific areas, we have been too much sector-oriented and divided from each other as professionals – such as teachers, nurses, physicians, social workers, etc.

Multi-sectoral and trans-professional collaboration is a real challenge for us. Collaboration has to be based on a solid ground and common values. Well, this is not a problem in theory. We all agree that we highly respect the value of human being, independency, empowerment, justice, involvement, cultural diversity and sustainable development, etc. The problem is how these values will be put in place and how to learn and share a common language among professionals.

Trans-professional and multi-sectoral collaboration cannot exist without certain prerequisites. We need more trans-professional training so that we have trans-professional teacher groups and also trans-professional student groups. We have some nice examples but we still lack, for example, common training periods for nurses and physicians. This really amazes me.

Special challenge is also to get evidence of effectiveness in promotion and maintenance of wellbeing. We don't know well enough which actions are the best or the most effective. We should also get more support for learning how to implement the evidence in practice and how to learn from each other. We do a lot of development in Finland, and also globally, but... the problem is that after special-funded projects the work will not continue. We should have more strategies, structures and tools for sharing our experiences of best practices. Forums like this are good opportunities, there is a platform ready to use.

As the theme of this forum is very wide, so is the programme. According to my calculations, in coming two days there will be nearly 20 presentations – all interesting and diverse.

Of course, things do not just happen. I know for sure that lots of time and energy have been spent on building this forum. I am using the opportunity to thank you all who have made this event possible. I know that in the regional council of Häme, we have special expertise among employees in the office, also among the collaborative partners. And I also know that a lot of work has been and will be done in the whole region for the wellbeing of people.

With these words, I declare this forum opened. I wish you all the most interesting and challenging days with full of discussions, different opinions and most of all real trans-professional and multi-sectoral collaboration.

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