
Elisabeth Swensen is this year's Dandelion

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Elisabeth Swensen. Photo: JNMA

During the Nidaros Congress in October this year, Elisabeth Swensen (b. 1951), Chief Medical Officer in Seljord Municipality, received the Dandelion Award for 2011.

Swensen graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Oslo in 1980 and was certified as a specialist in family medicine in 1994.

Each year during General Practice Week (PMU) or the Nidaros Congress, the Norwegian College of General Practice announces the winner of the Dandelion Award. The award consists of a lithography by Barbara Vogler and 20 000 Norwegian kroner. The award is given to a general practitioner who has made a special contribution to the field. This contribution may have been made at the central or at the local level, quietly or in the media, professionally or organisationally, practically or theoretically.

The nomination for this year's Dandelion Award states the following:

«Her work as general practitioner and Chief Medical Officer in a small, rural community in Eastern Norway for more than thirty years has established the legitimacy of her numerous initiatives, contributions, ideas and provocations. She has taken the floor in many forums and has always defended her position well – be it as a board member of our professional association, as editor of *Utposten*, as associated editor of the *Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association*, as a member of the Working Party of Rural Health of WONCA, as an organiser and lecturer, as a contributor to the news media and to *EYR* or as a supervisor for a great number of residents and candidates for specialisation in general practice. She has achieved the unusual feat of remaining critical of established positions while constantly being brought forward as the NMA's representative in a variety of contexts, most recently in professional forums discussing how practices related to medical certification and emergency response are to be regulated. With a critical eye, she infused the thinking related to risk in medicine with a new content in the early 1990s, and she was the first to challenge the revelation of truth when the EBM (Evidence-based-medicine) wave reached our shores just before the turn of the millennium. Before rural medicine became a familiar concept in this country she saw the need for a debate on the health services in rural Norway and for a description of how the services provided to the public are linked to social development in general. She also pioneered the establishment of the Norwegian Centre for Rural Medicine at the University of Tromsø, where she currently participates as a regional coordinator and as a member of the steering group.

She is in favour of plans to downscale psychiatry, she is an uncompromising defender of a wide normal variation in the life of humans as biological and psychological beings, and she claims that the GP should act as a guarantor who protects all patients from being arbitrarily treated as ill. Anyone who has viewpoints regarding these issues will not deny that her arguments are well-founded and hard to refute.

Her ability to express herself cogently is enviable –and her clever turns of phrase can most often be tolerated even by those who are the targets of her attacks when she is on warpath, which she occasionally is. Examples are easy to

find; some of these include major issues concerning regular salaries for Norwegian GPs, the struggle against corruption and increasing commercialism in the health services, and the use of Nordic languages, if at all possible, when colleagues meet abroad.

When asked to make an intellectual or creative contribution, she seldom declines – or perhaps she declines too seldom? But when she accepts, she is always up to standards, regardless of whether this involves spending hours at the steering wheel, sleeping short nights and mastering the logistical challenges involved in a life with four children, as well as heading the municipal health services and taking care of her own health as her primary areas of responsibility.

The discourse on general practice would not have been what it is without her. The Dandelion of the Year is Elisabeth Swensen!»

Norsk versjon av artikkelen

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