PILLAR OF ESSKA

ESSKA PAYS FULSOME TRIBUTE TO THOSE INDIVIDUALS - WE CALL THEM "PILLARS OF ESSKA" - WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED LARGELY TO OUR SOCIETY. IN THE CURRENT ISSUE, WE HONOUR PROFESSOR JÓN KARLSSON.

Jón Karlsson Interviewed by Jacques Menetrey

As the current Editor-in-Chief of the KSSTA Journal and the 2018 ESSKA Congress President, Jón dedicates much of his personal time to ESSKA. Here is his story:

JM WHAT LED YOU TO SPECIALISE IN ORTHOPAEDIC SURGERY?

JK That was more or less a coincidence. I graduated from medical school in Iceland in 1978, and worked in Reykjavik for several years, mostly in traumatology. I moved to Sweden in 1981, to the Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Gothenburg. I've worked at the same hospital ever since, except for a year-and-a-half's surgical training in the ‘80s. At the beginning, I'd decided to be a general practitioner (GP), but things changed. I really liked the trauma department in Iceland; it was exciting, there were vibrant people, and we did good work. Now Iceland is a small country, and for surgical training, you must travel abroad, with Sweden or the USA being the most common. One of my senior consultants had trained in Gothenburg, and he offered me to speak with his old Sahlgrenska friends, and find me a place. And so it happened.

JM WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS IN YOUR ORTHOPAEDIC CAREER?

JK Moving to the Sahlgrenska University Hospital was obviously an important step. I specialised in general orthopaedics, including joint replacements, during the early ‘80s, and became an authorised specialist in orthopaedics in 1986. Another important stage was defending my PhD thesis in 1989. My thesis concerned the treatment of ‘Chronic ligamentous instability of the Ankle Joint’. It was a clinical, radiological and experimental study. My mentor was Lars Peterson; he is now 81 years old and still doing surgery with me. We developed a method to reconstruct the lateral ligaments, using the remnants of the torn ligaments in patients with chronic problems. This method (based on the pioneer work of Lennart Broström) is still used worldwide. The difference was that Broström’s method was a repair, whilst my method is a reconstruction. Today, as we know, reconstructive methods tend to be arthroscopic, and I’m happy to work with some of the most prominent people in the field. These new arthroscopic methods were well described in a KSSTA special issue of April 2016, deriving from ESSKA’s Congress in Barcelona. The issue was called “There is no simple Ankle Sprain.” I was appointed Associate Professor in 1990, Assistant Professor in 1998, and Full-time Professor in 2010. Today, I’m employed at the Gothenburg University, but I’m still seeing patients. The biggest step in my career was my appointment to Full Professor, because that gave me increased freedom, to work in clinics and do research at the same time.

JM AND FOR A HOBBY, WHAT DO YOU DO?

JK I have two main hobbies. First of all, my four grandchildren; three girls and a boy. Wonderful children, and I prioritise to find the time to do fun things with them. Two of them live very close to me, and they really enrich my life. I hope I enrich their lives somewhat as well. Second hobby: I am the caretaker-physician for a football club in Gothenburg. I have been with the club since 1984, many, many years, and longer than anyone else. IFK Göteborg is a
professional club, successful through the years, but less so in recent years. I would say that Bosman limited the possibilities for the small clubs. During the ‘80s, for instance, we won the UEFA Cup twice (1982 and 1987) and reached the Champions League semi-finals (1994), but today we’ll not be anywhere close. My feeling is that there’s way too much money in football today; the rich clubs get richer and the poor ones stand no chance.

JÓN, HOW DID YOU COME TO ESSKA?

For me both ESSKA and ISAKOS seemed obvious, both to learn and to understand the international scene, and sometimes to teach. I became more involved with ESSKA, and Lars Engebretsen introduced me to their inner work. I worked on the Sports Medicine Committee together with Lars, and became its leader at the turn of the century. Lars is one of the most admirable persons I have ever worked with. He was ESSKA’s President, and did a great job reshaping ESSKA. It was during his leadership that I became KSSTA’s Editor. It was, in many ways, thanks to him that we were able to reshape the journal, and attain its current position. I was programme chairman for ESSKA’s biannual congress for 2006, 2008 and 2010. During this period we also reshaped the congress programme. For instance, we included keynote lectures, round tables and full-day programme. We tried to highlight posters, and bring more (and better) research into the clinical field of ESSKA. This is important, that is, to link scientific work to everyday clinical reality. And I think this was successful. The ESSKA congress is now one of the most important educational events for European (and world) arthroscopic (and other) surgeons.

In 2018, I will be the Congress President in Glasgow: We are already working hard on the scientific programme under the leadership of Gino Kerkhoffs, Michael Hirschmann and Fares Haddad. We are planning for the best programme ever, but we should not forget that Glasgow is a vibrant city with a lot to offer; so there will also be fun.

YOU ARE INTIMATE WITH SPORTS MEDICINE, IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF ESSKA’S ROLE IN THIS VAST FIELD?

There’s no doubt that ESSKA plays a central role. Our Education programme is very important, not only in European congresses, but other activities, for instance the ESSKA Academy, the extensive book publication project, and the journals. All of these are well established, and growing stronger. The KSSTA journal is an important part of ESSKA.

I was appointed Assistant Editor-in-Chief in 2008 and worked alongside René Verdouw for a couple of years until his retirement, when I took over as Editor-in-Chief. Today, we have a strong editorial team (I often call them my “Dream Team”), with Roland Becker as Deputy Editor and Volker Musahl and Michael Hirschmann as Assistant Editors-in-Chief. They really work hard, and without them the journal would not survive. Einar Eriksson founded the journal, and was Editor-in-Chief for 15 years (so I still have a lot to catch up on). He did the pioneer work, which was not easy. He laid the foundations, which we use.

In 2008, the journal received 400 submissions per year, published 90 pages per month and had an Impact Factor of 1.2. Today, these numbers are 1,600 submissions per year, 325 pages published every month and the Impact Factor is above 3.0. This places the journal in the Top-10 category in both Orthopaedics and Sports Science! We are very proud of this, but we’d like to do even better.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUNG ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEONS TODAY WHO ARE STARTING THEIR CAREERS?

This is not easy for me, as so much of my own career followed from fortuitous circumstance. What I did was to ‘follow my heart’, and do what I felt was best for my patients. This worked well for me. If this is a good policy for others, I really don’t know. Time will tell. Today, I have the fortune to work with one of the most skilled young surgeons I have ever seen, Kristian Samuelsson. I am sure he will be one of the leaders in the future. I have known him for 17 years now, since I operated on his ACL injury, and he was a patient in one of our studies. One piece of advice I’d give is that you should base your work on science and experience (you should not forget the past).

IF YOU WERE TO ADVISE A YOUNG PROFESSIONAL ABOUT ORGANISING HIS WORKING WEEK, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? HOW IS YOUR WORKING WEEK ORGANISED, AND HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU DEDICATE TO TEACHING, TO YOUR CLINIC, AND HOW MUCH TO RESEARCH?

Difficult question, because my week is an “organised chaos”, but it works for me. I do everything at the same time; between surgeries I can respond to e-mails and review two manuscripts, for instance. I still have full days of surgery (today I almost exclusively do complicated knee surgery, revisions, knee dislocations and similar). I usually say, “you can find time for everything, if you just plan it ahead”. I am not saying that all young persons should be like this, and maybe it’s not good for your health.

WE MUST ALSO FIND TIME FOR RECREATION, EXERCISE, AND FOR FUN.

ESSKA will be even stronger than today and I would guess a major force in education in Europe and worldwide as well. We have a very strong leadership today with Romain Seil as the current president. The central office is very strong and efficient, and co-ordinates ESSKA activities extremely well. I would guess that the biennial congress will be much the same, but we shall see more “in-between” activities, and the Sections will be much stronger, and a natural force in the ESSKA work. I foresee a new scientific journal alongside KSSTA. There will be changes, of course, but I hope our role will be different and more rapid and efficient than today, the Internet will be more central in our lives. I know that ESSKA is strong today, but the ESSKA of tomorrow will be even stronger.