

NORWEGIAN CENTRE FOR MARITIME MEDICINE IS ESTABLISHED

Being one of the biggest shipping nations in the world, it's about time Norway establishes a centre for maritime medicine.

The Ministry of Health and Social Services established the centre by a commission given in December 2004. From January 2005, a preliminary organization has been active, and the centre was regularly manned from June 2006.

NCMM is a Section of the Department of Occupational Medicine in Haukeland University Hospital in Bergen.

Commission

According to its commission, NCMM shall collect and mediate knowledge about maritime medicine to seafarers and fishermen, ship owners, ships, authorities, workers' organizations, employers' organizations, and others. NCMM also shall initiate and perform research, record incidence of illnesses and accidents at sea and support education and teaching. Furthermore, it is the Norwegian contact for international cooperation in maritime medicine. Radio Medico Norway has been active from 1948 in a very mobile concept. A group of four doctors now operates this service, which now will be incorporated in NCMM.

The team

Alf Magne Horneland MD is the director of NCMM. He is a general practitioner through 30 years, former district medical officer from different districts along the Norwegian coast and a Surgeon Commander in the Royal Norwegian Navy, where he at present is in the position as Head of Medical Department in the Navy Schools.

Director deputy/research director is Arne Johan Ulven MD, specialized in occupational medicine, and a chief physician in offshore medical services in Statoil, where he has been working for the last 20 years.

Professor emeritus Aksel Schreiner MD PhD is Head of Radio Medico Norway since 1983. He was the interim director of NCMM from 2005 until June 2006. We are pleased to benefit from his extensive experience in maritime medicine, and from his knowledge as a professor of internal medicine and infectious and tropical diseases.

From June 2007, Professor Eilif Dahl MD MHA PhD has joined the team. The professorship in University of Bergen, Institute for Internal Medicine, is the first professorship in maritime medicine in Norway, possibly also in Scandinavia, and is affiliated to Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine. Professor Dahl probably needs no more presentation to the global family of maritime medicine. He is well known from his work in IMHA and ACEP, as well as from his research and long experience as a ship medical doctor.

Currently we are focusing on several different areas:

Standards of pre-sea medical examinations

NCMM are conducting a work trying to merge existing regulations regarding standards for pre-sea medical examinations of seafarers, pilots and workers in the offshore petroleum industry.

Furthermore, we are looking at internationally agreed standard. The work is carried out in cooperation with the Norwegian Maritime Directorate, Norwegian Coastal Administration, Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Affairs and the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision.

Qualifications for medical doctors

We are focusing on special qualifications for medical doctors that conduct pre-sea medical examinations. The result will probably be an educational program prior to authorization for a period of five years, before re-qualification.

New regulations will possibly come into force by the end of 2008.

The Norwegian Maritime Health Registry (NMHR)

will be established. The NMHR will contain records from pre-sea medical examinations from seafarers working on board NOR and NIS ships, fishermen, pilots and workers in offshore petroleum industry.

New regulations will instruct medical doctors conducting pre-sea medical examinations to report medical records to the registry.

To comply with Norwegian legislation, Statistics Norway will be given the responsibility to replace identification data of the involved parties, such as individuals, ships, shipping companies and medical doctors with pseudonyms before registration.

On a regular basis, relevant information will be transferred from other existing national health registries in Norway, to build a database for epidemiological studies. Relevant Norwegian Registries are:

- The Cause of Death Registry
- The Cancer Registry of Norway
- The Medical Birth Registry of Norway
- The Norwegian Surveillance System for Communicable Diseases (MSIS)
- The Tuberculosis Registry
- The Childhood Vaccination Registry (SYSVAK)
- The Norwegian Prescription Database
- The Maritime Casualty Reporting System (Maritime Directorate)

The NMHR will publish statistical reports on a regular basis, and will become an important source for research in maritime health epidemiology.

Consequences of MLC 2006

Norway is about to ratify the Maritime Labour Convention 2006. Changes in existing legislation are now proposed.

NMMC is working together with Det Norske Veritas (DNV) to develop systems for inspection and control in accordance with the demands of MLC 2006.

Education

In connection with the qualifications requirements for medical doctors carrying out pre-sea medical exams, there is an obvious need for a textbook of maritime medicine. NCMM will take an initiative to edit a book meeting the demands and covering maritime medicine in general.

Norway has approved about 400 medical doctors all over the world for pre-sea medical examinations according to Norwegian legislation. An internet portal will be established for the qualifying and training purposes for these doctors.

Research

Current research projects include:

- Influence of Different Duty Schemes on Fatigue in Seafarers
- Influence of Artificial Green Light on Fatigue in Seafarers
- Health and Wellbeing in Seafarers' Closest Relatives at Home
- Working Conditions for Norwegian Pilots.
- New projects looking into preventing spreading of infectious diseases on board passenger ships, and research on motion sickness is on the planning stage.

International cooperation in maritime medicine

The project of developing a Telemedical Maritime Assistance Service (TMAS) Cooperating Network, unfortunately, has been dead in water for several years. NCMM will try to re-establish this project in its original form, or in a form adjusted to the present situation in cooperating nations.

There are many other topics where international cooperation is fundamental to a successful result in maritime medicine. In fact, maritime medicine is the most international of all fields of medicine. Without cooperation, we cannot achieve much. NCMM wants to be a part of the global family of maritime medicine, and is seeking cooperating partners all over the world.

Alf Magne Horneland
Director NCMM