

## The History of the Nordic Mental Health Congress 'Schizophrenia Days'

The Nordic Mental Health Congress 'Schizophrenia Days', or 'Schizofrenidagene' is Stavanger University Hospital Mental Healthcare Clinic's most important Conference. It's a Conference for mental health professionals – and at the same time so much more.

### The name:

'Schizofrenidagene' got its name at a time when almost nobody dared say the word 'schizophrenia' – neither mental health professionals nor patients and their families. People often ask why we don't change the name to 'Stavanger Psychiatry Conference' – more about that later.

'Schizofrenidagene' was initially a continuation of an internal training programme on psychosis for employees at Stavanger University Hospital/Rogaland Psychiatric Hospital during the years 1985 – 1988. At that time this involved lectures for mental health professionals only - nothing for the general public.

In 1988 we had the first lecture for the general public, here in the gym at the Psychiatric Clinic. One summer day we got the idea to move the event into town, and to add cultural events and information for the general public to the original programme for mental health professionals. The focus of the event that year was Schizophrenia, and we had Professor Thomas McGlashan as our first international lecturer. The event lasted for two days, and was held in Stavanger Cultural Centre in the heart of Stavanger. The lectures for the public were a sensation, with audiences of over 500 per event! This was completely new for Norway – and most likely, for other parts of the world too. VG (one of Norway's biggest national tabloids) had a two page article about it. We had a lot of cultural events too, including a Lars Hertervig exhibition and honorary lecture. Stavanger Artist's Association demonstrated outside the Cultural Centre, saying we were stigmatising artists by making a connection between art and mental illness.

During the first years of the political Conference a number of Health and other Ministers made appearances at the Conference; Werner Christie was a very frequent guest. In recent years we've had contributions from key politicians, more often than not in connection with the Conference opening, School Day, or Leader Seminar.

Right from the earliest days, the Schizophrenia Days Conference has emphasised psychosocial approaches to mental health problems, both in terms of treatment and understanding of the symptoms, eg psychotherapy, family therapy, art therapy and associated therapies, also for psychosis. However we also aim to bring in the latest breakthroughs in non-psychological treatments.

Our overall objective has been to provide people with serious mental health problems access to psychological treatment forms.

The Conference for mental health professionals aims to provide participants with an update on the most important developments in assessment and diagnosis, but it isn't a scientific conference as such. Our aim is to present the most significant challenges within the field in a way that ordinary clinicians can understand and find beneficial. Lectures at the Conference are tailored to Assistant Doctors' and psychologists' obligatory training requirements, and are at the same time beneficial for other mental health professionals at a variety of different levels.

### Aim:

- a. Normalise rather than sensationalise
- b. Antistigma
- c. Access to information for ordinary people

- d. Give our mental health professionals access to the best international research
- e. Limit countertransference associated with schizophrenia and other psychoses
- f. Provide better treatment ie the best treatment available
- g. Provide psychiatry in Rogaland with a high profile in relation to psychiatry nationwide (branding, recruitment, professional pride)
- h. Encourage early diagnosis and treatment
- i. By means of the cultural programme, offer an arena for emotional reflection - for the public, patients, and mental health professionals

**Target groups:**

- a. the general public
- b. patients
- c. their families and friends
- d. schoolgoers
- e. teachers
- f. health personnel in primary care
- g. health personnel in secondary care
- h. Social Services, Child Protection, Addiction Services etc
- i. Health bureaucrats and others
- j. Others ( eg the Police)

**Method:**

- a. Open lectures for the general public
- b. Advertising
- c. Newspaper coverage/reports
- d. Seminars for mental health professionals
- e. Political Conference
- f. Working Life Conference
- g. Leadership Seminar – for the mental health system’s administrative and professional leaders and directors
- h. Seminar for General Practitioners
- i. School Day (1700 school-leavers every year)
- j. Conferences for specialist groups ( eg Police, Child Protection)
- k. Art Exhibitions
- l. Theatre performances
- m. Cinema
- n. Competition for the region’s schoolgoers ( photos, articles, posters, etc)

**Organisational Committee:**

Stiftelsen Psykiatrisk Opplysning (Mental Health Information Foundation) and Stavanger University Hospital Psychiatric Division are the principal organisers.

Always multidisciplinary, all interested parties can join the Organisational Committee. LPP (National Association for Patients and Families in Mental Health Care) and the 'Pårørende Centre' (Centre for Friends and Families) are 2 important user-organisations that are regular members of the Committee.

In addition to these, different organisations, Councils, and institutions are invited to join, according to the theme for the year: the County Medical Office, Mental Health Council, SEPREP, Stavanger Council, Children and Family Services, Elf Norway, Adults for Children, ADHD-Association, University of Stavanger, Sandnes Council, Jæren and Sola District Psychiatric Centres, Rogaland County Council, different government departments etc. – the list goes on!

**Finances:**

The event is organised on a non-profit basis. The Conference usually receives funding from the Norwegian Health Directorate, Rogaland County Council, Stavanger Council, Stavanger University Hospital, Health-West, Inge Steensland's Foundation, and others.

Our aim is to provide an affordable alternative to other more commercial actors in the Conference market.

**Main themes for the conference so far:**

These are decided at meetings of the Psychiatry Professional Council:

1989: Schizophrenia at the centre

1990: Manic- depressive illness – a generational perspective

1991: Schizophrenia – What you know can't harm you

1992: Anorexia and bulimia

1993: Schizophrenia – Early Intervention and Treatment

1994: Personality Disorders and Substance Misuse

1995: Schizophrenia

1996: 'Trauma Days' – Psychological reactions to extreme stress

1997: Schizophrenia – Effective treatment of Schizophrenia per 1997 – where do we stand and where are we going??

1998: Working with patients' friends and families

1999: Angst – OCD - Depression

2000: Schizophrenia and other psychoses: Different stages – different treatments?

2001: Prevention of mental health problems – Antistigma

2002: Focus on those with severe mental health problems, and schizophrenia

2003: "Good boys and good girls – or kids behaving badly?"

2004: Diagnoses: Useful tools – or dangerous labels?

2005: "Personliga Persson" – Personality Disorders, Development and Relationships

2006: Does the wound on the soul have a colour? Trauma and mental health in an intercultural perspective

2007: Addictions – for better or worse

2008: Schizophrenia 1908-2008.

Is 'Schizophrenia' obsolete or does current research warrant the development of new terms?

Psychosis: Difference - Creativity – Madness.

Stavanger European Capital of Culture in 2008

2009: There's more between people than heaven and earth. Relationships in milieu and psychotherapy

2010: All you need is love. Sense and sensibility – affective disorders

2011: Psychological treatment forms in a time without boundaries

2012: Psychiatric take away – they ring, we bring!

2013: The Circle of Life: attachment, relationship and personality

2014: Evident or evidence: Our mental health services – do we think they work or do we know they work?

2015: Emotions in motion; from affect to disorder

2016: Bodies of Experience

2017: Roots and shoots: Past event and present minds

2018: Our Tribe: Wired to Connect

### **Gerd-Ragna Bloch Thorsen's Memorial Lecture**

Gerd-Ragna was one of the initiators behind the Schizophrenia Days Conference. She died suddenly of a heart attack on 19th August 2006, only 55 years old. The Schizophrenia Days Conference has since 2007 organised a Memorial Lecture in Gerd-Ragna's name, with a special focus on antistigma, humanism, solidarity and commitment to good patient treatment.

Gerd-Ragna Bloch Thorsen Memorial lecturers:

2007: Astrid Nøklebye Heiberg

2008: Per Vaglum

2009: Lars Thorgaard

2010: Jon-Roar Bjørkvold

2011: Per Fugelli

2012: Mads Gilbert

2013: Ingvard Wilhelmsen

2014: Jan-Ole Hesselberg

2015: Sven Egil Omdal

2016: Siri Hustvedt

2017: Atle Dyregrov

2018: Arnhild Lauveng

Every year during the Congress, the **Schizophrenia Days' Award of Honour** is awarded to persons or organisations that have excelled themselves through their work in the mental health field – be it in research, treatment, openness, knowledge, information or antistigma work.

Previous winners of the Schizophrenia Days' Award of Honour:

Thomas McGlashan

Hagobert Akiskal

Julian Leff

Eivind Haga og Jan Haslerud

Per Vaglun

Odd Steffen Dalgard

Mental Health

Gerd Ragna B Thorsen og Jan Olav Johannessen

LPP – National Association for Families and Friends in the Mental Health Care System

Johan Cullberg

Lars Thorgaard

Jon Johnsen

Arnhild Lauveng

SEPREP Foundation

Ellen Brodtkorb and Esben Jaer

Anne-Lise Øxnevad, Hanne-Grethe Lyse Nielsen, and Anne Fjell

Svein Friis and Stein Ilnert Opjordsmoen

Aina Basilier Vaage

Odd Lingjærde

Fjell County Council

Doctor and Professor Per Fugelli

Stiftelsen Psykiatrisk Opplysning (Psykopp – the Mental Health Foundation) was set up around the same time as the Congress started, with mostly the same objectives: increasing openness around mental health issues, sharing information and fighting stigma. Since it was first set up, the Foundation has published more than 150 books, brochures, training packs, and has built up more than 20 years' experience in arranging courses and conferences on psychiatry and mental health issues.

TIPS, and the 'What's up with Monica?' teacher training programme have also been developed with the same principles in mind.

In the 30 years that have passed since Schizofrenidagene's inception, the themes for the year have alternated. The initial plan was to focus on psychosis every other year. As time has gone on, this has become more flexible, and psychosis is now one theme amongst many. The overall focus has also shifted between adult psychiatry and children, young adults and a lifelong perspective.

Thankfully, schizophrenia and psychoses are no longer surrounded by the same degree of myth, ignorance and stigma as they once were. Most professionals working in the field are also sceptical to the term 'schizophrenia' as a diagnosis, and are working to get it removed from the diagnosis list. So why continue with this somewhat outdated and antiquarian name, when the Conference is about so much more than schizophrenia? Good question, and the answers may not be the best ones.

Firstly, it's become a kind of brand name for our event - our name stands out in the jungle of competing Conferences and seminars.

The other reason is that we have a hope that the word 'schizophrenia' will eventually move out of psychiatry and into daily speech, and will be used more and more as a term to describe an 'inbuilt contradiction'.

Our Congress has grown into a PsychiatryCultureSeminarFestival, and maybe that's how we'll be marketing ourselves more in the future.

We're aiming to keep our position as the country's most important meeting point for all those that work within or are connected to the mental health field – including psychiatry, addiction, somatic health, Youth Work, Educational Health Services, Social Services and Child Protection.

The Nordic Mental Health Congress 'Schizofrenidagene' has developed into the largest regular interdisciplinary mental health/psychiatry conference - and festival - in Scandinavia. We offer professional seminars and workshops, pre-seminars, School Days, lectures for the public, important contributions from user-organisations and businesses, theatre, cinema, debates, high profile art exhibitions, book launches, and rock concerts for young and old.

Yours sincerely

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