

Financial Crisis: Implications for Healthcare Discussed in Riga

In recent years, all national medical associations have witnessed economic instability and repeated up-and-down fluctuations in economic conditions that threaten the sustainability of healthcare systems. Against this background, many fruitful presentations were made and discussions held at the Conference of the World Medical Association (WMA) on the Financial Crisis—Implications for Health Care, held in Riga, the capital of Latvia, this September.

The Conclusions announced as the culmination of the conference stressed the necessity for more spending precisely during times of economic downturn. Japan achieved a universal health insurance system in 1961, and it has been a common concept in Japan that such a system would protect people in low-income groups and other vulnerable sections of the population from serious damage even during an economic crisis. Nevertheless, the economic crisis has inevitably harmed the sustainability of the healthcare system, necessitating political decision-making to ensure steadfast support so that the national government can firmly maintain the universal health insurance system.

Looking back at the discussion at the Confederation of Medical Associations of Asia and Oceania (CMAAO) meeting held in Bali, it was reported that active communities function as a complementary support for the vulnerable groups within them, and I saw that such communities remain alive and well in Bali. In cities and many developed countries, such communities are steadily collapsing. Surely under such circumstances it is impossible for people to lead secure lives without the safety net provided by a universal health insurance system.

Riga is a beautiful town with an atmosphere and building dating from the Middle Ages, and its historical center has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city's sight-seeing attractions were also conveniently located



Sunrise on the river Daugava, Riga

near the central plaza in the historical area. The Riga Dome Cathedral resounded with the beautiful sounds of Europe's representative pipe organs. The performance of Puccini's *Il Trittico* at the Opera House was a highly sophisticated. Written near the end of Puccini's life, all of these one-act operas projected the composer's concept of death and dying, yet they were still filled with the vital wit and satire that can be seen in his most popular works. An authentic medieval restaurant I entered in Old Riga, once a wine vault and festival hall for Riga's city council, was interesting, very dark due to its being lit by candles, and the food served in typical medieval utensils was delicious.

I thought that Riga's old-world flavor was as if a part of ancient Europe had been stored in a refrigerator and kept unchanged until the present day. I felt fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit this city, and sincerely hope that the sufficient support is provided for healthcare in Latvia and that Riga is able to overcome the current harsh economic conditions.

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