



## Jussi Huttunen

\* 27.8.1941 † 1.7.2023

Former Director General of the National Public Health Institute (later the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare), Professor Jussi Huttunen died on 1 July 2023 after struggling with a severe illness. He was 81 years old.

Jussi Huttunen was born in Helsinki on 27 August 1941, during the first months of the Continuation War. His mother, an upper secondary school graduate, was a stay-at-home mother, as was the custom of the day, and his father qualified as a physician and later specialized as a psychiatrist.

Already in primary school, Jussi was an avid reader who carried backpacks filled with books home from the library. This hobby stayed with him throughout his life, and in his retirement, Jussi and his former colleagues had a book club that met every month. Jussi's curious and playful mind was not limited to books only. Even as a child, he learned to enjoy various card games with his maternal grandfather, who lived with the family, and played casino, canasta and, later on, bridge. He passed this skill on to his children and grandchildren.

Jussi Huttunen received the degree of Licentiate in Medicine at the age of 25 and soon after earned a doctorate in Medicine and Surgery from the Department of Med-

ical Chemistry, University of Helsinki. Around the same time, the fast and efficient man married Raili, a soon-to-be specialized nurse, and had two daughters.

Huttunen qualified as a Docent in Medical Chemistry in 1968 and moved with his family to the warmth of California for two years to work in the research team of Professor Dan Steinberg at the University of San Diego. The research focused on regulation of the enzymatic synthesis and breakdown of human lipids and their crucial role in the development of atherosclerosis, i.e. the thickening or hardening of the arteries. This line of research remained one of Huttunen's lifelong scientific interests, although he explored many other themes as well.

After returning to Finland, Jussi Huttunen started working in a hospital and became a Specialist in Internal Medicine at the 3rd Department of Medicine, University of Helsinki. From there, he was persuaded to come to the University of Kuopio in 1975 as Associate Professor of Internal Medicine, initiating and developing research at the Internal Medicine Clinic, especially regarding diabetes. Jussi was known as an inspiring teacher and researcher and a diligent physician who

took good care of his patients. Others also had their eyes on the brilliant clinician-researcher-teacher, and the young man was eventually recruited as Director General of the National Public Health Institute of Finland (KTL) in 1978.

Huttunen made an impressive career as the director of KTL. Under his leadership, KTL transformed from a service and supervising laboratory into what soon became an internationally recognized, top-level research institute. KTL turned its focus to the impact of risk factors, lifestyles and nutrition on public health and the risk of disease, and the diseases that were targeted included coronary artery disease, cancers and diabetes. Genetic research emerged strongly in the 1990s. Under Huttunen's leadership, KTL invested in epidemiological research platforms and launched controlled prevention studies. The director himself was actively involved in research, and his hand could be seen, for example, in the planning and implementation of the Helsinki Heart Study, focusing on the prevention of coronary heart disease, and the ATBC cancer prevention study. As he retired at the end of his term as Director General, Huttunen was involved in planning the merger of KTL and Stakes to form the new Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, where the strong research tradition has fortunately been preserved.

Jussi Huttunen was involved in just about every activity within the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim. He was editor-in-chief of the *Duodecim* medical journal 2003–2006, chair of the Duodecim Society of Helsinki 1987–1988 and chair of the entire Finnish Medical Society Duodecim 1996–1999. This period also included a term as chair of the Board of the Duo-

decim Publishing Company Ltd 1996–1998. On top of all this, after his retirement, Jussi Huttunen continued as the news editor-in-chief of the Duodecim Publishing Company and ran the news service of Duodecim for more than 10 years. Over the decades, Jussi wrote dozens and dozens of articles on health, risk factors and nutrition for the *Duodecim* journal, the Terveyskirjasto health library and the Terveysportti service. In these articles, Huttunen provided current and easily understandable health information for both the general public and professionals in the field.

Jussi Huttunen also served in numerous positions of trust both in Finland and abroad. He served as chair of the boards of the Diabetes Research Foundation, Cancer Research Foundation Finland, Finnish Society of Internal Medicine, Cancer Society of Finland, Finnish Centre for Health Promotion, National Nutrition Council, Finnish Heart Association, Finnish Foundation for Cardiovascular Research, Finnish Mental Health Society, Juho Vainio Foundation and the UKK Institute, among others. Huttunen also had the time to act as chair of the Scientific Council for Health of the Academy of Finland. The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters invited Huttunen, then aged 46, to become its member in 1987.

Huttunen's work gained considerable recognition over the decades. He received the golden medals of the Finnish Diabetes Association and the Finnish Heart Association, the prize of the Finnish Cultural Foundation, prizes from the Paavo Nurmi Foundation and the Jalmari and Rauha Ahokas Foundation, the Pohjola Medical Award and the Information Award for Medical Journalists. Huttunen was invited

to become an honorary member of not only the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim, but also the Finnish Society for Nutrition Research and the Finnish Society of Internal Medicine. He was also Honorary Doctor at the University of Kuopio.

Jussi Huttunen rarely refused invitations or requests, but was still able to stay organised and make progress despite his numerous activities. Huttunen's written and spoken texts were easy to follow, and he could easily adjust his words to the reader or the listener. Because of this, Jussi Huttunen was often consulted as an expert on a wide variety of topics, ranging from explaining scientific observations to analysing problems in public health care. The media would also make use of Huttunen's knowledge and skills, for example during the many twists and turns of the Finnish health and social services reform. He was very upset by the fact that the experts' opinion on the number and structure of the areas organising health and social services was not taken into consideration. Throughout all this, one of Huttunen's main priorities was to address the hidden inequalities in health care.

Jussi had a wide range of interests. He kept a close eye not only on developments

in the medical field, but other disciplines as well, read literature and followed current politics. It was perhaps fortunate that, after retirement, he had more time for his hobbies and loved ones. He and Raili reached the sixty-year mark in their marriage, and "Pappa" taught his five grandchildren to enjoy reading. Jussi was a member of several societies and clubs cultivating culture, science and art, and also had a passion for golf and snooker.

Jussi and Raili had a beloved summer house in Vesanto, which they had acquired in the 1970s. Jussi enjoyed manual chores as a counterbalance to his day job, and friends who visited were always offered food and a sauna. When a friend was looking for a rare plant, Jussi would go hunting for it. As a friend, Jussi was peaceable, fiercely loyal and unselfish – he accepted his fellow humans for who they were, without expectations or demands.

Despite leading an exemplary, healthy lifestyle, Jussi was struck by a progressive illness, which had an inevitable impact on the last two years of his life. Fortunately, Jussi's mind and memory remained sharp almost to the very end. And his legacy has been permanently preserved in Finnish health care.

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