

# PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH AND TRAINING IN THE NORTH EUROPE - Lithuania perspective/report -



**INTERVIEW GUIDE with Professor RAMUNĖ KALĖDIENĖ, MD, MPH, PhD**

Dean of the Faculty of Public Health, Head of Department of Health Management, Medical Academy, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences

Prof. Ramunė Kalėdienė, MD, MPH, PhD, Habilitated Doctor, Dean of the Faculty of Public Health, Head of the

Dept. of Health Management at Lithuanian University of Health Sciences. She is also president of Lithuanian Public Health Association, vice-president of Lithuanian Society of Health Management, member of different committees at the Lithuanian Ministry of Health, expert of Health Committee at the Parliament of Lithuania, and member of the National Board of Health at the Lithuanian Parliament. Ramune Kale-diene serves as expert of the accreditation of the Schools and programmes of public health for European region, is member of Scientific Committee and Governing Council of European Public Health Association (EUPHA). For several years, she has chaired the Peer Review Committee of the Association of Schools of Public Health of European Region (ASPHER), was member of the Board of ASPHER. She served as expert for developing schools of Public Health in the European region and took part in the assessment and development of public health training programmes in Russia, Georgia, Moldova, Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Syria, Spain and UK. Ramune Kale-diene worked as adjunct professor at the Nordic School of Public Health in 2001-2003. She also served as WHO expert for human resource development in public health and inequalities in health. Her scientific interests cover social and demographic inequalities in health and health care, epidemiology of suicides and external causes of death in Lithuania. Prof. R. Kale-diene is an author or co-author of several textbooks and more than 300 scientific publications on related issues.

*Reporter: Professor Ramunė Kalėdienė, you are in the position to coordinate the Public Health Research and Training activities in Lithuania for more years. This position, but also your high and relevant international experience in public health and healthcare domains confers you an overview about the current concerns and trends in the field of public health and recommend you as a key strategic actor in the Lithuanian Public Health context.*

*–In your opinion, do you consider the patterns of public health issues in national and European context are changing? Please detail by focusing on the health challenges in the*

*– In your vision, what is the role of PH faculty in a modern and integrative Europe?*

**RAMUNĖ KALĖDIENĖ:** The challenges in health and health care are rather similar in Europe, with cardiovascular diseases and cancer being among the top priorities. Nevertheless, mental health is an important issue in Lithuania with extremely high rates of suicides, prevalence of depression, high alcohol consumption. Inequalities in health is a huge problem in our country, with clear disparities among urban and rural populations and different educational groups. Health care reform is in continuous process in the country, since effectiveness and efficiency of Lithuanian health care system has to be seriously addressed. Therefore, public health professionals and health managers play very important role in addressing those challenges and the need of training of such competent workforce is considered as priority. Lithuanian University of Health Sciences is a place where majority of Lithuanian health professionals are trained, including wide range of public health, health management and related experts.

**R:** *The institution you coordinate has an interesting history, being one of the biggest schools of Public Health in Central and Eastern Europe.*

*– Please provide a brief historical perspective on the main steps of development of your institution. What are the main training programmes developed at FPH and what is the target groups for each ones?*

**RK;** Faculty of Public Health(FPH) was established in 1994 as a part of Kaunas University of Medicine, which developed later into Lithuanian University of Health Sciences. I have been involved in the development of the FPH since its very beginning, working there as a teacher, head of the department and serving as a dean since 2002. It is a place where variety of research and training competences meet together, enabling those who work in public health practice and research to effectively confront the challenges of rapidly changing health care system. The competences in biomedical, social, psychological and multicultural areas that affect health of population are necessary for the modern public health professionals, health managers or health politicians. To meet this challenge, new creative methods of training and research are widely applied in the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral training programmes. The Faculty started from bachelor program in public health, and later new programs of Master in Management of Public Health, Master in Public Health have been developed. Later, the FPH widened its scope and programs of Social work in Medicine, Health Psychology, Health Informatics were developed. →

Recently, we have started Master program in Lifestyle Medicine, which is the first program of such type in Europe. This program attracted large interest and support from our American colleagues, who are much more advanced in this area compare to the European Region. I hope, this idea will be disseminated across Europe soon, taking into account our example. All in all, there are now 11 different programs offered at the FPH with more than 400 students involved. FPH is an active member of ASPHER, is WHO collaborating center for non-communicable disease control and WHO Operations Research Regional Training Centre in Reproductive Health.

*– How research activity is organised to support training activity in your institution? Please refer to some relevant and recent research projects your institution is involved.*

**RK:** FPH is well known as a research center for public health in Lithuania and has Institute of Health Research in its structure. The FPH focuses its research on the large sets of population based data. For several decades, it is involved in such large scale projects as Health Behaviour In School-Aged Children (HBSC) - a World Health Organization collaborative cross-national survey covering 48 countries of the World, FinBalt Health Monitor, evaluating health behaviours, perceived health and the use of health services in Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Finnish adult populations since 1994; well-known CINDI project on monitoring of trends in risk factors for non-communicable diseases, long-lasting projects on monitoring inequalities in health (EUROTHINE, DEMETRIQ, LIFEPATH) and many more.

*- What are the key elements your institution manages to perform training and research activities with good results?*

**RK:** The success of each institution depends on many factors. In our case, I think that the major strengths of our School is people - highly competent, experienced and internationally recognized researchers and teachers, who managed to develop international collaboration, as well as leadership and long lasting involvement in national and international projects. Active involvement of staff members in national and international health policy formulation and implementation also plays an important role. FPH is a place where experience of managerial, psychological and sociological competences meet and are integrated into biomedical field.

**R:** *Health systems are divers and PH education needs are not similar across Europe. Despite these, in a global perspective, similar institutions from different countries could collaborate and put together objectives, experiences and resources to assure a high level education in PH for professionals.*

*– To what extent do you consider that similarity could be beneficial for regional cooperation in PH and PH education field?*

*– What do you think would be the issues that should be developed such regional/trans-border cooperation? Please detail also for specific issues in the North Europe.*

**RK:** Cooperation and collaboration of the Schools of Public Health is essential nowadays. Public Health area is still not a priority in many countries with dominating medical sector. Lack of sustainable financial resources because of underfinancing of public health care sector in comparison to clinical and patients care sector is common situation in majority of the countries. The overall trend of science commercialization is a challenge in the field of public health, since the main results of research conducted in public health areas are traditionally directed towards the society and health policies. In terms of training – international approach is extremely valuable in the area of public health, therefore development of exchange programs, creation of joint programs and initiation of common research activities should be considered as a priority for all schools of public health.

**R:** *For numerous national PH schools, ASPHER provide a framework for capacity building and for promoting education, research and service in public health in order to foster a creative and dynamic academic and practical training infrastructure for public health workforce development.*

*–What are the benefits for your institution as an ASPHER member?*

*–What other partnerships or collaborations do you have and what are the benefits of such collaborations?*

**RK:** Our Faculty is a member of ASPHER for several decades, benefiting from this by being involved in different activities of the ASPHER. I am sure, that membership in this association is important for every School of Public Health not only because of dissemination and exchange of information, but also because of wide possibilities of collaboration in international projects, partnerships in different competence development activities, as well as contribution to the development of entire European public health sector. I am glad that ASPHER widened its scope out of the margins of Europe and now schools of other continents are involved in the network. This enhances learning from each other and mutual growth.

In our training programs we actively collaborate with several American universities, Griffith University in Australia and many European Universities. Some modules in our training programs are thought by visiting professors or provided by foreign universities. I am sure that this is a future model for public health training around the World, which has to be enhanced. There are more and more ideas of development of joint degree programs and other international activities, which would strengthen positions of our School both at national level and internationally.

**R:** *Would you like to add anything else, maybe an answer to a question unaddressed in this interview?*

**RK:** I just want to emphasize, that FPH at the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences is open for international cooperation and we are happy to share our experience. We are ready to learn from colleagues from around the World, since being an actor in such a dynamic area encourages us to search for the new ideas and opportunities.