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Symposium in memory of Anne-Lise Christensen

Contributions to holistic neurorehabilitation programs and treatment of traumatically brain injured patients

By Jaana Sarajuuri

“If one is to succeed in guiding a person from one state to another, one must first ensure that one can identify where the person is to be found and start there. This is the true secret of helping. All true helping begins with humility. The helper must first humble himself to the person that he wishes to assist and from this position understand that helping is not to dominate but to serve.” This quotation from the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was of special interest to Anne-Lise, quoted often in her presentations as in her speech in 2012 when IBIA honoured her with Lifetime Achievement Award, and in line with her conception of neurorehabilitation as keeping the central focus on phenomenology of human behaviour. Observing Alexander Luria at Burdenko University Hospital, in Moscow, applying his sophisticated method of investigation allowed Anne-Lise to evaluate impairments in neuropsychological functioning of patients, to learn to integrate clinical findings and insights into a comprehensive picture of the patient, and moreover, “to relate the patients genuinely with utmost respect in profound appreciation of his/her experience”.

During her lifelong career Anne-Lise developed many international collaborations with colleagues. In the seventies Yehuda Ben-Yishay and Leonard Diller in New York, and George Prigatano in Oklahoma pioneered the holistic neurorehabilitation programs for TBI patients. In Europe, resulted from these collaborations, Anne-Lise established a holistic program at Copenhagen in 1985. In the years coming several similar programs were established in Europe. The European Holistic Rehabilitation Working Group was founded in 2001, Anne-Lise as the legitimated honorary member.

According to her humane personality Anne-Lise preferably encouraged and supported also us younger colleagues to learn to serve people with brain injuries, and to keep on to improve the future of neuropsychological rehabilitation. I personally have experienced Anne-Lise's gentle affect as a member of the holistic neurorehabilitation community. Since 2000 we have been members of the Euroacademica Multidisciplinaria Neurotraumatologica. In the 2000's and 2010's we have participated research projects as members of an international TBI Task Force to develop the first TBI-specific instrument to assess health-related quality of life, the QOLIBRI, and further related research.

Anne-Lise's role has been outstanding in advancing our understanding and treatment of people with brain injury. Her efforts have inspired us and provided far reaching influence on successful neurorehabilitation.