



Finnish Medical Association



# Finnish Medical Association

## – Uniting the Medical Profession

The Finnish Medical Association (FMA) is a professional organisation and an independent trade union representing physicians from all branches of medicine in Finland. It is based on a voluntary membership. The Association and its members work in numerous ways for the benefit of patients and the improvement of the Finnish health care system. The total membership is more than 21,000, which corresponds to about 94% of all physicians in the country.

The mission of the FMA is to work for the advancement of medical expertise, humanity, ethics and collegiality. The Association brings its members together in support of these values and safeguards their common professional, social and economic interests. Its policies are decided by elected members, who are supported by a professional staff of about 70 based in Helsinki.

The promotion of medical ethics has been a basic function of the Association since its establishment in 1910. The Association is active in matters relating to ethics and patient safety both in Finland and internationally. It also develops and publishes ethical guidelines for its members.

With the backing of the combined professional knowledge of its members, the Association works actively to develop health care and advance medical education and expertise in Finland. In order to meet these objectives, the FMA also regularly works with other organisations and bodies in the health and labour sectors. A central task of the Association is to ensure fair remuneration and other terms of employment for its members. The FMA does not grant licences or discipline doctors, since in Finland these are tasks of the government.

The FMA participates in the work of several international medical organisations, the most important of which are the World Medical Association (WMA), the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME), the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS), the European Union of General Practitioners (UEMO) and the Council of Nordic Medical Associations (NLR).



**Finnish doctors have been striking to improve their wages**

### **The tasks of the Finnish Medical Association**

- Advancing the medical profession
- Uniting doctors as a professional body
- Safeguarding doctors' interests
- Promoting health and the best interests of the patient
- Defending humanity and ethical values in Finland and internationally

### **Safeguarding members' interests**

The FMA is recognized as one of the strongest and most influential professional organisations in Finland. It is a member of the Confederation of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (AKAVA).

Medical practitioners are highly educated experts, whose remuneration should reflect their professional status and the demanding nature of their work. The FMA negotiates salaries for its members in the municipal and government sectors. In this work it collaborates closely with the Finnish Dental Association and the Finnish Veterinary Association, with both of which the FMA has formed a negotiating body.

In addition to remuneration matters, safeguarding members' interests also includes questions relating to working time arrangements, on-call duties and high workloads.

## **Promoting health care and patient benefits**

The FMA actively contributes to the work of parliament, the government and various other authorities and decision-making bodies with the aim of developing health care in Finland. The Association is ideally placed to contribute professional expertise in this context as it represents nearly all doctors in Finland. Ensuring high-quality health services for everyone serves the interests of both doctors and patients.

The FMA pursues several initiatives and issues a number of statements each year with the aim of improving health care and the related legislation. The aim is to ensure that good quality care is available to all patients. Health services must be properly resourced, and the right of patients to choose their doctor and treatment location must be catered for.

## **Developing medical education**

In collaboration with Finnish universities and medical specialist societies, the FMA works to develop basic and postgraduate education and to further the professional competence of doctors. Clinical work is an essential part of the basic education. Finnish medical education is highly regarded internationally.

Almost two thirds of all Finnish physicians are specialists. The number of specialties in Finland is 49, of which 16 require five years' training and the other 33 take six years to complete.

As a supplement to the official system of specialisation, the FMA has introduced a number of special competences. These relate to specific specialty areas in which particular skills of a demanding nature are required. Suggestions for the establishment of new areas of special competence usually stem from the specialist societies.

Every January, the FMA organises Finland's largest medical congress: Lääkäripäivät – the Finnish Medical Convention. The Association also provides various other continuing medical education opportunities for its members throughout the year.

## **Improving the quality of health care**

The FMA has undertaken pioneering work in improving the quality of health care. The Ethical Guidelines for the Quality Assessment of Health Care, which have been approved by the Board of the Association, state that “each doctor must continually evaluate the quality of her or his work and the level of her or his skills by means of self-assessment procedures”.

Each year, the Association confers a quality award on a project that has been shown to benefit the provision of health care and the treatment of patients.



**The representatives of the Finnish Medical Association present the WMA Helsinki Declaration to Urho Kekkonen, the President of Finland in 1964**

## **Defending ethical values in Finland and internationally**

One important activity of the FMA throughout its existence has been to promote ethical principles. When the Association was established in 1910, the first President expressed the hope that it would become "the heart and conscience of the medical profession".

The rapid advances taking place in medicine constantly confront doctors with new ethical issues. Every few years, the FMA publishes a compilation of the opinions of its Ethics Committee and ethical guidelines issued by the Association itself. This publication is distributed to all Association members and is used by the university faculties as course material.

Finland has been active in establishing ethical provisions internationally, via both the WMA and the umbrella organisation CPME. The most noteworthy are initiatives relating to the rights of the patient, continuous quality improvement and telemedicine. The FMA also made significant contributions to the review processes concerning the Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (the WMA Declaration of Helsinki).

## **Services to members**

The FMA looks after the interests of its members and offers them high quality advisory services and membership benefits. The negotiating department of the Association offers help in relation to professional legal matters as well as remuneration, contractual and social security issues.

All FMA members receive Suomen Lääkärilehti (The Finnish Medical Journal) weekly. The journal is the medical publication most widely read by Finnish doctors. Its articles and English summaries are also available to members on the internet.

The Association offers members the internet services doctors need in their work. All members and all medical students receive, free of charge, an internet user code and password. These allow access to the member pages of [www.medassoc.fi](http://www.medassoc.fi), medical databases and other useful services of the Finnish Medical Network (FiMnet).

The benefits available to FMA members include insurance coverage. The membership fee includes patient injury insurance for doctors in private practice, and the Association has also negotiated numerous other insurance policies under favourable terms to which members can join if they wish.

FMA members can participate free of charge in the Doctors' Unemployment Fund. This pays an earnings-related daily allowance during periods of unemployment. The Association also operates its own employment agency for job opportunities in Finland. Doctors who plan to work abroad can obtain information from the Association about applying for the right to practise medicine and about finding employment in a range of countries.

## **Nearly all doctors are members**

FMA membership is voluntary, but nearly all doctors who practise in Finland choose to be members. Entire classes of medical students join the Association after their fourth year of study, i.e. when they can practise medically for the first time. Doctors from abroad can join the Association if they have a licence to practise medicine in Finland and the senior doctor in their place of employment recommends them for membership.

## **Members elect decision-makers**

The highest FMA decision-making body is the 60-member Delegate Committee, which is elected by members every three years. The Delegate Committee decides the main policies of the Association and approves its budget. It also elects the Chairman and other Board members.

The practical work of the Association is directed by the Board, which has 10 members. The Chairman of the Board is the FMA president. The Board is assisted by a number of committees, which deal with issues relating to members' interests, health policy, medical education, ethics and finances.



Primary healthcare is provided by municipal health centres.



## Health care in Finland

Health services are available to all in Finland, regardless of their financial situation. Public health services are mainly financed from tax revenues. The child mortality rate in Finland is under 0.3% – one of the lowest in the world. The life expectancy for a girl at birth is 83 years, for a boy 76 years.

The life expectancy of Finnish men is lowered by cardiovascular disease, excessive consumption of alcohol and accidents. Cardiovascular mortality has declined in response to effective health and nutritional education in recent decades, but excessive blood cholesterol levels and obesity remain common in Finland. Smoking and drug abuse are significantly less frequent in Finland than in Europe on average.

The aims of Finnish health policy are to lengthen the active and healthy years of its citizens, to improve quality of life, and to diminish differences in health regionally and between population groups. Prevention receives particular emphasis in primary health care.

### **Primary health care**

Finland is divided into hundreds of municipalities, which are responsible for arranging health care for their inhabitants. Primary health care is provided by health centres established by a single municipality or jointly by neighbouring municipalities. Municipalities may also buy services from other municipalities or from the private sector.

Health centre services include medical consultations and provision of dental care, preventive care and environmental health care. Health centres run maternity and child health clinics, and arrange school health services.

Most Finnish municipalities have arranged primary health care through a family doctor system. The aim is for a patient to be able to contact her or his doctor and have the need for treatment assessed within three working days. Relationships between doctors and patients have become closer. The benefits of long-term patient-doctor relationships include a reduced need for hospital examinations.

Outpatient care is also provided by private and occupational health care units. Employers are under an obligation to arrange occupational health care for their employees. About 6% of Finnish doctors work in occupational health care, offering both preventive services and primary health care.

## Specialist care

Finland is divided into 20 hospital districts, each providing specialist consultation and care for its population. Local municipal authorities are responsible for funding the specialist treatment provided for the inhabitants of their areas.

In comparison with other countries, the number of hospital beds in Finland is fairly high. There has been a trend towards reducing the number of hospital beds through arranging patient care in a stepwise manner and through transferring more patients to outpatient care. The number of emergency units has also been reduced in an effort to save costs and reduce the workloads of doctors.

## Cost of public health care

Central government's contribution to municipal health care is determined by population numbers, age structures and morbidity statistics. The decline in public sector health care expenditure in recent years has led to increases in costs to households.

Finland spends less on health care than most other EU member states. This is due both to the efficiency of the system and to the relatively low level of wages in the health care sector in Finland. The FMA has repeatedly demanded more resources for health services.

## Private health care

Private medical treatment supplements the care provided by municipalities. Many doctors, dentists, and physiotherapists offer private care, particularly in cities. There are also a few small private hospitals.

More than 10% of Finnish doctors earn their living solely as private practitioners. About one third of doctors run a private practice in addition to working in a hospital or health centre. Most private practitioners work in group practices.

The mandatory national health insurance scheme reimburses a proportion of the fees paid by patients to private doctors, the costs of prescribed medicines, and travel costs arising from the treatment of illness. All Finnish doctors are covered by the reimbursement system, which is administered by the Social Insurance Institution.



**Over half of the Finnish medical profession is female.**



# The Medical Profession in Finland

There are more than 21,000 licensed doctors in Finland. Over 800 Finnish doctors of working age live abroad and some 400 doctors who are not Finnish nationals practise in this country. Over half of the Finnish medical profession is female.

## Medical education

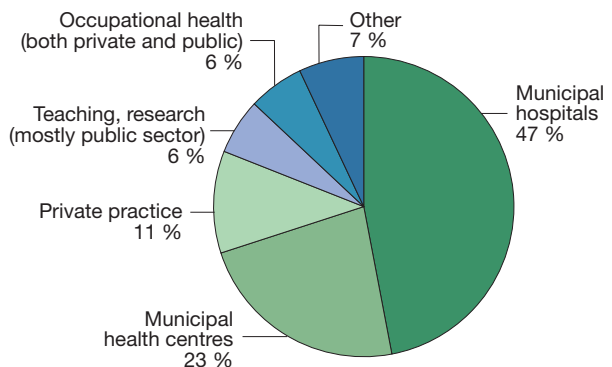
In Finland, medical degree courses are offered by five universities (Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Oulu, and Kuopio). The basic medical course lasts for some six and a half years and leads to the degree of Licentiate of Medicine.

The number of students admitted to medical schools has varied greatly in recent decades. Because of the shortage of doctors, mainly in primary health care, the number of medical students has been increased to about 600 a year. The view of the FMA is that an adequate supply of doctors for public health care should be ensured by improving the remuneration and working conditions of public health doctors rather than by increasing the number of students.

Students come into contact with patients from the beginning of their studies. Problem-based learning methods have been introduced. All medical schools have research programmes for students who wish to undertake scientific work.

During the clinical period of their courses, students participate in the work of various hospital and health centre departments, where they learn the necessary medical skills. After each clinical course, students have to pass a final examination in the specialty concerned.

**Finnish physicians by main employment**





**The Finnish Medical Association participates actively in the work of the Council of Nordic Medical Associations.**

## **Practice of medicine by foreigners in Finland**

Everyone coming to Finland from abroad to work must obtain a residence permit if her or his employment is to last longer than three months. The permit is granted by the police department in the place of residence. Citizens of EU member states do not need work permits.

Doctors from within the EU or EEA can obtain a licence to practise medicine in Finland on the basis of directives concerning mobility of doctors and mutual recognition of diplomas. The National Authority for Medicolegal Affairs assesses and approves the education of health care professionals and recognises degrees. Doctors need a Physician Identification Number which can be obtained from the Social Insurance Institution after the licence has been granted.

The licensing of doctors from within the EU and EEA does not require a demonstration of language proficiency, but employers such as municipalities may require certificates relating to linguistic skills. Treating patients would be difficult without a knowledge of Finnish.

To receive a licence to practise medicine in Finland, a doctor from outside the EU or European Economic Area (EEA) has to receive practical training and pass a three-part examination that includes questions relating to administration, legislation, and clinical medicine, and a practical section testing the individual's ability to cope with normal clinical situations. There is also a language test.

Licences are granted stagewise. The initial licence is valid only for hospital work. It can subsequently be extended to cover health-centre work, then work in other institutions and in private practice. Licences are always granted for specific periods of time. If a holder of an extended licence is granted Finnish citizenship, the National Authority for Medicolegal Affairs ([www.teo.fi](http://www.teo.fi)) can authorize her or him to practise medicine independently as a licensed physician.



Finnish Medical Association  
Mäkelänkatu 2 • P.O. Box 49 • FIN-00501 Helsinki • Finland  
Telephone +358-9-393 091  
Fax + 358-9-393 0794  
fma@fimnet.fi  
www.medassoc.fi

