

Royal Norwegian medal of merit to Swedish professor
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Claes Tropé's efforts for women with gynaecological cancer is a story of struggle as well as breakthrough and success. On September 7, he received The royal Norwegian medal of merit, the highest honour a foreign citizen can receive.

When Claes Tropé became a senior medical doctor at the Department of Gynecological Cancer, at The Norwegian Radium Hospital, he came from a position as head of department and lecturer at Lund University in Sweden.

– I considered several options, including being employed at the Karolinska Hospital in Stockholm or moving to the United States.

The choice fell on Oslo, primarily because of the possibilities of dealing with cancer surgery. Since then, Tropé has been an important figure, both for its patients and for the development of new therapies. It is for this work he is now awarded by HRH King Harald.

At that time, The Norwegian Radium Hospital was at the forefront of international cervical cancer survival. Not everything was perfect, however.

– Until then, one was most concerned about saving women's lives and less about her quality of life afterwards," he says. He describes how women - often young - after radiation therapy had to live with chronic pain and a broken sex life.

Changing a winning game often results in a lot of resistance. The first time in Norway was tough for the swede, himself a doctor's son. Many were sceptical of his competence and whether he had had enough contact with patients, as he was a lecturer in cell biology and spent a lot of time in the lab.

An important supporter in this period was Jan Vincents Johannessen.

– I promised I would help him if he was willing to take the chance, says the former hospital director.

Today, Tropé refers to Johannessen as his main coach and mentor.

Tropé was able to develop a new treatment regimen - by only removing the tumour with so-called radical surgery, and cutting the radiation for patients that demonstrably did not need it.

As he was able to show good results, the criticism also muted. However, Tropé started a new struggle, this time for the introduction of fertility-preserving treatment. The new practice raised questions: Should you keep women's fertility if they could die of relapse after years of childbirth? A wall covered with thank-you cards from newly-

baked parents at Tropé's office was for many years the most visible confirmation of what the method meant for his patients.

Important for gynaecological patients

Claes Tropé has been very important for understanding gynaecological patients and their situation says the head of The Norwegian Association for gynaecological cancer, Jeanette Hoel.

– He has been a pioneering figure and a good role model for others by taking into account the patient's feelings and quality of life, which has not always been a matter of course. All honour to him, says Hoel.

In 2006 he led a major and controversial change in the treatment regimen for ovarian cancer patients. Following an order of the Minister of Health, Sylvia Brustad, 40 Norwegian hospitals ceased operating women with ovarian cancer. The background was surveyed by Tropé and his colleague Torbjørn Paulsen, who showed significantly greater survival among patients operated at regional hospitals compared to local patients. Tropé is also among those who have continued the introduction of new expensive drugs, often with subsequent accusations of blasting hospital budgets. The most important focus in the years to come, according to Tropé, should be on the so-called prediction – the development of methods to predict what development a cancer disease will have - so that it can also lead to a more individualized treatment.

Some of Claes Tropé's merits:

Professor Emeritus, a specialist in gynaecological oncology

Head of Department and Professor at the Department of Gynecological Cancer, Radium Hospital, Oslo.

Received Kong Olav Vs Cancer Research Prize 2012.

Has been a supervisor for more than 50 PhD degrees and published more than 600 scientific articles.

Vice President of the Society of Pelvic Surgeons.

Led Norway to a leading position for finding a cure for cervical cancer, number three in the world on cervical cancer and number 10 on ovarian cancer treatment.

Read more about gynaecological cancer at Kreftlex.no

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The King's Medal of Merit (Norwegian: Kongens fortjenstemedalje) is a Norwegian award. It was instituted in 1908 to reward meritorious achievements in the fields of art, science, business, and public service. The medal in gold is rewarded for extraordinary achievements of importance to the nation and society.