



## Organising congresses in the time of Covid-19

How do we plan and execute international scientific congresses in the time of Covid-19, with ongoing travel restrictions and social distancing? Covid-19 or not, we still need to do our utmost to help our patients by bringing them the best possible diagnostic tools and customised treatments. Even in challenging times, it is important that we, as a medical physics community, get together to share and discuss current clinical issues.

The Nordic Association for Clinical Physics (NACP) has its roots in the 1960s. Since then, NACP meetings have been held regularly to serve its role as the main forum for scientific exchange between Nordic medical physicists. Each meeting has been hosted by one of the Nordic medical physics societies. In 2020, Iceland was planned to host the symposium as a joint venture with support from the Norwegian and Danish medical physics societies.

The NACP 2020 symposium was scheduled to take place in May 2020 with an overall theme of "Novel medical technologies - applications, assessment and implementations". The scientific committee had invited outstanding researchers from all over Europe and the US, who were due to cover topics such as artificial intelligence, advanced CT, molecular imaging and radiotherapy. One of the highlights was to be the talk by Professor Søren M. Bentzen of the University of Maryland School of Medicine, US, where he intended to share his thoughts on why new technologies are not translated from research to clinic.

When we started to plan the NACP symposium back in 2017, our biggest fear was that a potential volcano eruption in Iceland would cancel our plans. Little did we know that another force majeure, namely the ongoing devastating global pandemic, would not only change our planned symposium but completely change our lives and the world we lived in. When we realised the severity of the situation, we postponed the meeting to April 2021 and planned a replica of the original meeting to be held in Reykjavik.

During December 2020 we realised that we had to decide whether to postpone for a second time or to go digital. The force of the NACP symposia is the informal mingling with our colleagues across the Nordic countries. How could we transfer this informal mingling into a digital space? Also, we were worried that after one year of digital meetings and webinars, we would all be tired of staring into our screens and would refrain from participating. But postponing a second time would mean competition with other postponed national, European and international meetings and congresses.

We took a leap of faith, and hoped that potential participants had learned to appreciate the availability and flexibility of digital meetings. Thankfully, the majority of the invited speakers including Professor Søren M. Bentzen accepted our renewed invitation for the digital edition of the NACP symposium. It turned out that the NACP 2020/2021 digital edition far exceeded our expectations. Over 300 participants enrolled for the digital version, compared with about 140 participants who had registered for the physical meeting in Iceland!

Our thoughts on the success factors were that we had organised an attractive scientific programme with outstanding invited speakers, a reduced participation fee, a favourable group participation fee, and recordings of all talks were available one month after the symposium.

We want to thank the scientific committee for an outstanding programme, all presenting authors for inspiring talks, and all 260 participants and 50 company representatives for lively and fruitful discussions. And thanks to our professional congress organisers for flawless planning and execution!

During the digital meeting, we all agreed that the platform we used was as good as it gets, as long as we have to be digital. But we can't wait to meet face-to-face again and discuss the latest scientific talks during lunch and coffee breaks in future NACP meetings!

You are all more than welcome to join us (in person!) in Iceland in 2023.



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Colleagues at Haukeland University Hospital watch the NACP meeting symposium while keeping a safe distance from each other. From left: Grethe May Engeseth, Øyvind Lunde Rørtveit, Kristine Fjellanger and Liv Bolstad Hysing. Photo: Helge Pettersen.

