



Address
by
the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson
at *Resuscitation 2016*
the conference of the European Resuscitation Council
at the Hilton Hotel, Reykjavík
24 September 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is difficult to imagine anything nobler than saving the life of a fellow human being. To snatch someone back from the grasp of death and return them to the light of day. Healthcare workers perform wonders every day and every night, helping us towards better health, alleviating suffering, saving lives. These are deeds that no words are adequate to thank. But it is no less important to teach the rest of us, the ordinary public, how to act when someone standing beside us collapses because their heart has stopped. How we can, if only we know what to do, make the difference between life and death.

Here today we have a magnificent international conference on important issues concerning resuscitation, with particular emphasis on the educational dimension, including the best way of teaching children the right things to do to resuscitate a person in need. There is an Icelandic proverb that runs something like ‘What you learn when you’re young, will be there when you’re old’. [*Hvað ungur nemur gamall temur.*] If we learn how to do something the right way when we are young, that knowledge will stay with us all our lives.

In many parts of Europe, people are now trying to have lessons in resuscitation included as part of the regular curriculum in compulsory schooling. In my opinion this would be a great thing. The statistics explain why. About 700 thousand people die each year in Western countries from cardiac arrest outside hospitals. That is 2,000 people every day of the year in the West alone. Studies have shown that these deaths could be cut by about a third if more people knew

how to go about giving resuscitation first aid – in other words, if the public were better informed. The best way of tackling this would surely be to begin teaching resuscitation right from junior school age and maintain the skills learned through regular revision.

We are well aware in Iceland of how important a part the public plays in charity work. Each year, Icelandic search and rescue teams save many people who are in mortal danger. All these teams are staffed by volunteers who use their spare time to learn and hone their skills, training mind and hand by attending courses and applying their knowledge on expeditions into difficult terrain. For them, a knowledge of resuscitation is an absolute basic. In the same way, that knowledge should be something that everyone in the country has, as a sort of ‘standard issue’ for Icelanders.

It is a special pleasure for me to have the opportunity to open Resuscitation 2016. In particular, I welcome our overseas participants to Iceland, and I hope your work here will be fruitful.