



**OPENING ADDRESS
AT THE SEMINAR
*ICELAND AND FINLAND:
FRONTRUNNERS IN BIO & HEALTH TECHNOLOGIES***

**Speech
by
the President of Iceland
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson**

**Helsinki
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Your Excellencies,
Dear friends:

It is a privilege for me to address this gathering of stakeholders in the healthcare industries of Finland and Iceland, and I thank you all for attending this event.

Two days ago, on the airplane from Keflavík to Helsinki, I read an interview in one of the Icelandic newspapers. It was with an Icelandic man who had turned one hundred years old that day. He is in good shape, lives on his own in a retirement community, can get all the necessary assistance and meals but likes to make his own dinners. When asked why he thought he had lived this long, the old man pointed out longevity in his family, and that he has never smoked in his life. “Also, I quit working very early,” he added and laughed. Around the age of twenty, he became a fishing boat captain: “Then I could just watch others do all the labour,” this vigorous centenarian said.

Dear friends: In general, people on this earth are getting older and healthier. Many still enjoy a high quality of life like Karl Sigurðsson, the old skipper from Hnífsdalur in the Westfjords of Iceland. Others are not so

fortunate. We need to focus on age-related diseases, not the least dementia, this difficult and devastating disease.

In recent years, the healthcare industry has made amazing progress, as this symposium can demonstrate so well. It is vital that we work together, exchange knowledge and ideas, share our thoughts and join hands for the common cause, to improve people's lives.

As a layperson, I can only listen and learn, and quietly think to myself that, God willing, the time will come when I might hopefully benefit from scientific and medical advances in the healthcare and biotech industries. The good work of the Finnish companies that are showcased here is well-known. Understandably, however, the Icelandic companies are more familiar to me. Back home, many have heard about Nox Medica and its research on sleep and sleep diagnostics. And speaking of sleep and old age, I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin's dictum, which my grandmother used to cite in old age: "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Meanwhile, Mentis Cura is developing technology that is positioned to improve access to affordable brain diagnostics, and improve the likelihood of early and accurate diagnosis of dementia. On the airplane over to Finland, I also read an online chapter of a new biography on the life of the late actor and comedian Robin Williams. He suffered from one form of such degenerative disease but did not receive the right diagnosis, which may have led to his untimely death.

And then we have Össur, the prosthetics company. In August 2016, on my first foreign trip as President, I attended the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro. There, I really saw for the first time and close-up the huge benefits that technological advances in this field can have. Also, I saw what I would like to call the triumph of the human spirit, the determination to overcome obstacles, the will to reach the goal that has been set.

Dear friends: Technical and scientific advances will be vital in the gigantic task ahead of us, to make sure that people can lead happy and healthy lives. At the same time, this task must not overburden our economies. Therefore, we must do more, something that looks simpler but is at least equally important: We must encourage people to embrace a hale and hearty lifestyle. Quick and accurate diagnosis is important, cure is even better, but prevention is best.

In all walks of life, we need to encourage and reinforce a healthy lifestyle, a positive attitude and a compassionate society with adequate means to help those who need help. It is equally important, however, that we continue to seek advances in medical science. That is why your work is vital. I thank the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Federation of Icelandic Industries for their dedication to this field, and I wish you all the best of luck in your valuable efforts.