

Focus on Nordic-Baltic Collaboration – Notes on a Nordic Seminar on Indexing in Health Sciences

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The Finnish Association of Medical Librarians BMF - [Bibliothecarii Medicinae Fenniae, the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim](#), [the National Library of Health Sciences](#), Helsinki, and [the Karolinska Institute Library](#), Stockholm, joined their forces with the support of [NORDINFO](#), the Nordic Council for Scientific Information, to organize a Nordic Seminar on Indexing in Health Sciences at the new biomedical centre in Helsinki, [Biomedicum](#) Helsinki, on the 22nd of May 2002.

The purpose of the seminar was to bring together health sciences librarians from Nordic and Baltic countries to review and discuss current issues in

- Indexing languages;
- Indexing and searching processes;
- Medical Subject Headings – MeSH - as the major indexing instrument/language for health sciences librarians, as well as the vernacular versions of MeSH - FinMeSH and SweMeSH - from a multilingual perspective in the digital environment;
- Educational and training needs.

Fifty librarians and information specialists from Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Estonia participated in the Seminar chaired by Liisa Salmi from [Kuopio University Hospital Medical Library](#).

The seminar [programme](#) succeeded in combining theoretical issues with practical ones and, indeed, served as a stimulus to intensive discussions during and after the sessions.

Theoretical issues were addressed by the representatives of two university departments of information studies: Sara von Ungern-Sternberg from [Abo Akademi University](#) and Jaana Kekäläinen from [Tampere University](#).

Sara von Ungern-Sternberg gave an introduction to the key issues of the day in her paper *Indexing and thesauri – basis for finding information – what are the educational needs?* She highlighted the indexing process through concept analysis, term identification and term assignment, and the thesaurus structure through thesaurus relationships - semantic (relation to meaning), syntactic (relation to other words), pragmatic (relation to the actor/user), as well as the current educational needs. She emphasized the knowledge of indexing and thesaurus theory, the knowledge of the subject field and its terminology, the knowledge of indexing instruments, and the knowledge of the end user information behaviour in the education of librarians and information specialists. In her overview of some research projects of her university department she pointed out that with the increasing digital resources and global reach of health information, the multilingual and multicultural environment will have a more and more pronounced impact on indexing and searching processes – a fact which should be considered in the curricula of information studies at all levels.

On the other hand, Jaana Kekäläinen provided insights into intellectual indexing versus automatic in her challenging presentation *Is intellectual indexing viable?* On the basis of her research, and for the reassurance of the audience, she stated that intellectual indexing *is viable*, particularly in specific subject fields. Relying on human capacity in the processes of meaning identification, indexing language representation and pre-coordinated vocabulary control, intellectual indexing results in a greater accuracy and precision, i.e. a better retrieval quality than automatic indexing. Human intellect is still the invaluable characteristic of an indexer; human capacity can be aided by an automatic process, e.g. in indexing masses of full texts, but cannot be replaced by it. She concluded that the hierarchies and ontologies of information networks imply structures which are being investigated and will be exploited in indexing – both intellectual and automatic.

More practical views on the issues were taken in a series of [MeSH presentations and papers on MeSH-based vocabularies](#):

by Marie Monik, [the Karolinska Institute Library](#), in her MeSH review *MeSH – the State of the a*; by Gun-Brit Knutsson, [the Karolinska Institute Library](#), in her *Presentation of SweMeSH*, the Swedish version of MeSH; by Leena Lodenius, [the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim](#), in her *Presentation of FinMeSH*, the Finnish version of MeSH; and by Marianne Tallberg, [Kuopio University](#), in her paper on a MeSH-based Finnish 'CareMeSH' *Nursing Thesaurus and indexing nursing resources in Finland*.

Three different approaches to producing vernacular versions of MeSH / MeSH-based vocabularies were given:

- Term use frequency > SweMeSH: the Karoliska Institute Library;

- Term category > FinMeSH: the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim;
- Term definition > Finnish 'CareMeSH': the Finnish Society of Nursing Education.

The Karolinska Institute Library has taken the most pragmatic approach. The translation project was started in 1995 by translating the MeSH terms used ten times or more in indexing articles to the Swedish Medical bibliography SveMED. The 2002 version of SweMeSH contains 17000 terms; most of the MeSH headings have been rendered into the Swedish, and, in addition, 4500 MeSH scope notes have been translated and related to the Swedish usage of corresponding terms. Articles in the Swedish medical bibliography SveMED are indexed with English MeSH terms, which are automatically mapped to the corresponding SweMeSH terms, and the database can thus be searched with either Swedish terms or English terms.

[SweMeSH](#) is available on the web, so is the [indexing manual](#), which is used in training of indexers, cataloguers and searchers of MeSH-based databases.

The Finnish MeSH FinMeSH, on the other hand, has been developed and produced by the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim for the use of clinicians – the Society has a hundred year tradition of promoting the use of the Finnish medical language. The translation, started in 1989, has been done by a medical doctor, backed by a team of medical specialists, working systematically category by category from A to Z; the National Library of Health Sciences - Terkko has been coordinating the project in the library field and reporting on its progress since 1996, while the Finnish Association of Medical Librarians BMF has been promoting the project on various occasions.

The 2002 version of FinMeSH contains 18000 terms; most of the MeSH headings and all the subheadings have been rendered into the Finnish, but no MeSH scope notes. FinMeSH is primarily used for indexing and searching Finnish journal articles for [the Physician's Database](#) (LCD) available on the web. Its indexing capacity has been tested with the material indexed to the Finnish medical bibliography Medic, and a solution to utilize its bilingual (English/Finnish) function for indexing and searching is being investigated in cooperation with the Karolinska Institute Library.

FinMeSH is one of the 26 source vocabularies of the Unified Medical Language System [UMLS Metathesaurus](#).

The Finnish 'CareMeSH' is a 'MeSH-frameworked' Finnish vocabulary for indexing and searching Finnish nursing material. It has been developed under the auspices of the Finnish Society for Nursing Education and by a team of nursing science experts. In contrast to FinMeSH and SweMeSH, the Finnish 'CareMeSH' was started in 2000 by selecting the appropriate nursing terms from MeSH and evaluating and defining them through four [Delphi rounds](#). The 2002 version of the Finnish 'CareMeSH' contains 500 nursing terms grouped under ten theme headings from the International Classification of [Nursing Phenomena ICNP](#). Its validity for indexing nursing material, journal articles and scientific publications, to the Finnish medical bibliography Medic is being tested, as well as its functioning as a component of FinMeSH.

An Estonian version of MeSH is in progress, so is a Lithuanian version; a Latvian version may follow in due course. What about a Norwegian or a Danish version or an Icelandic version?

Cooperation between the Nordic-Baltic countries could enhance setting up a common interface for all to benefit from the multilingual capacity of the Nordic-Baltic MeSH community.

As a result of the presentations as well as the discussions that took place during the seminar and after it, all who were present became aware of the importance of sharing experiences and working more closely together as a Nordic-Baltic group.

It was agreed that this would apply especially to learning from each other in utilizing

- 1 - Advanced technology for virtual education and training;
- 2 - The indexing language systems and instruments developed by the US
National Library of Medicine: Medical Subject Headings - MeSH and Unified Medical Language System - UMLS, as well as the vernacular versions of MeSH;
- 3 - The changing environment of the indexing process;
- 4 - The changing environment of the searching process.

The seminar was concluded with a call for a Nordic-Baltic follow-up in the near future focusing on one of these four facets/areas of indexing in health sciences.

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