

## **Iceland Establishes a Clinic for ME/CFS Patients – The Akureyri Clinic**

**August 16th, 2024**

A clinic for patients with ME/CFS and long-Covid has been established in Iceland that will serve patients nationwide. It has been named “The Akureyri Clinic” after the town in Northern Iceland where it is located, which notoriously experienced an epidemic of ME/CFS 75 years ago which became known as the Akureyri disease.

The idea of establishing the Akureyri Clinic was led by the ME/CFS MD team in Iceland, with support from Alma Möller the Medical Director of Health and Willum Þór Þórsson, the Minister of Health

The clinic was officially established on August 16th with a ceremony held at Akureyri Junior College, where the Icelandic Minister of Health, and the directors of the Akureyri Hospital and the Healthcare Institution of North Iceland (HSN) signed a cooperation agreement.

The Akureyri Clinic will be located at the Akureyri Hospital. The Minister of Health stated in his address his high hopes of the cooperative model on approaching this deliberating disease both for clinical service and research opportunities and announced an additional annual contribution of up to 100.000.000 ISK (700.000 EUR) to meet the expenses of the clinic.

Alma Möller the Medical Director of Health, Friðbjörn Sigurðsson MD, Runólfur Pálsson CEO of Landspítali University Hospital and Dr. Jonas Bergquist MD and professor at Uppsala University in Sweden also gave short presentations on their view on the possibilities and challenges of the newly established Akureyri Clinic. Two ME/CFS patients, Herdís Sigurjónsdóttir and Vilborg Ása Guðjónsdóttir shared their battle with the disease.

“The Akureyri Clinic is in many ways a unique project on a national and even global scale and we are very proud to participate in this collaboration,” says Hildigunnur Svavarsdóttir, CEO of Akureyri Hospital. “The establishment of the center opens up many opportunities. With it, we can better manage the registration of ME/CFS and build a database on ME/CFS and long-COVID, which gives our researchers unparalleled opportunities for research and increased knowledge of the disease for the benefit of ME/CFS patients.”

“The establishment of the Akureyri Clinic is a much needed project, as we have seen a significant increase in the number of people diagnosed with ME/CFS in recent years, especially following Covid-19,” says Jón Helgi Björnsson, CEO of HSN. “It was therefore crucial to obtain government funding for the operation, which will allow us to begin to increase our knowledge of the nature of ME/CFS and in the process develop a more comprehensive and intensive service for ME/CFS patients nationwide, which is in great demand.”

“The establishment of the Akureyri Clinic and the strong engagement from the Icelandic government, the National Icelandic Healthcare system and the healthcare providers really acts as a fantastic raw model to the rest of Scandinavia, to Europe and the World. The tremendous problems that patients with ME/CFS and other post-infectious disorders suffers from have been very much underestimated, underdiagnosed and poorly understood. The acknowledgement of the disease, the

true need for specialist care teams and collaborative research perspectives is a very important and strong statement from Akureyri and Iceland” says Jonas Bergquist, MD and professor at Uppsala University.

In addition to clinical service the Akureyri Clinic has the responsibility of developing and coordinating a nationwide registry for ME/CFS and long-Covid. This registry will definitely give unique opportunities for research. The Akureyri Clinic will also collaborate with Department of Immunology at the Landspítali University Hospital in a new research center focusing on infections and immunity in a wider perspective.

The Akureyri Clinic has a coordination role for service for ME/CFS patients nationwide. It collaborates with Landspítali University Hospital, rehabilitation centers and others medical professions in Iceland that serve ME/CFS patients.

An interdisciplinary team has been set up in Akureyri that is currently composed of two MDs a nurse, two social workers, occupational therapist and physical therapist. It is important to bring together different professions to address holistically the needs of ME/CFS patients. Patients have to be referred to the Akureyri Clinic by a primary care physician. The team has started to see patients and it is clear that the need for service for this patient group is very high.



Dagbjört Bjarnadóttir,  
nurse and team leader



Friðbjörn Sigurðsson,  
medical doctor



Ingunn Eir Eyjólfsdóttir,  
social worker



Julia Leschhorn,  
medical doctor



Kristín Brynja Árnadóttir,  
occupational therapist



Lilja Sif Þórisdóttir,  
social worker



Ragnheiður Harpa  
Arnardóttir,  
physical therapist

The team is grateful for all the advice and support it has received from our colleagues and friends in the international ME/CFS field. Special thanks are given to:

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- Professor James Baraniuk, Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA
- The Board of the International Association for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis
- The ME/CFS team at Nova Southeastern University's Institute for Neuro-Immune Medicine, Florida, USA
- Vicky Whittemore PhD, at National Institute of Health, Bethesda, USA
- Dr. Michael Stingl, Vienna, Austria
- Prof. Dr. med. Carmen Scheibenbogen, Charité, Berlin, Germany
- Colleagues at PIAF-pain inflammation and fatigue, Stockholm, Sweden

The clinic could not have been established without the very important international collaboration and support.

We have high expectations of the possibilities that the Akureyri Clinic will be able to contribute internationally in the field of ME/CFS and long-Covid.

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Photos from the ceremony of the establishment of the Akureyri Clinic



From the left: Alma Möller, Medical Director of Health, Jonas Bergquist Uppsala University, Sweden, Friðbjörn Sigurðsson Akureyri Hospital, Willum Þór Þórsson Minister of Health and Runólfur Pálsson Landspítali University Hospital.





Willum Þór Þórsson, Minister of Health



Jonas Berquist, professor at Uppsala University Sweden



From the ceremony.



Herdís Sigurjónsdóttir



Vilborg Ása Guðjónsdóttir



Hildgunnur Svavarsdóttir, CEO of Akúeyri Hospital, Willum Þór Þórsson Minister of Health and Jón Helgi Björnsson, CEO of HSN, signing the agreement.