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NEWSLETTER

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ANESTHESIA PATIENT SAFETY FOUNDATION

CITATION: Filipescu D. A tribute to Jannicke Mellin-Olsen (1957–2025). *APSF Newsletter*. 2025;2:65.

A Tribute to Jannicke Mellin-Olsen (1957–2025)

by Daniela Filipescu, MD, PhD, DESA, FESAIC

Norwegian anesthesiologist and global health leader, Jannicke Mellin-Olsen, MD, DPH, FESAIC, passed away suddenly on February 7, 2025 at her home outside Oslo. With her death, the world lost a giant in patient safety and patient-centered care.



Jannicke Mellin-Olsen, MD, DPH, FESAIC

Dr. Mellin-Olsen completed her medical education and residency at the University of Trondheim, Norway, and became the first female military doctor in Norway. She later served with both the United Nations (UN) and Red Cross. She was recognized globally for her immense commitment to her patients and to the safety of anesthesiology all over the world and was the recipient of honorary membership from medical societies across Europe and beyond.

With more than 40 years of leadership at the local, national, regional, and global level, Dr. Mellin-Olsen was instrumental in many of the leading innovations within anesthesia safety and health care quality, including

- Being one of the authors of the seminal 2010 Helsinki Declaration on Patient Safety in Anaesthesiology, which has been endorsed by anesthesia and critical/intensive care organizations worldwide;
- Implementing simple, yet highly effective bedside changes to improve patient safety through improved communication between health care professionals and those receiving care, such as “the orange chair” project, which encourages Norwegian health care professionals to sit down by their patients’ beds to encourage better two-way communication;
- Being one of the originators of The National Commission of Inquiry into Health & Care Services in Norway which reviews patient safety incidents nationally; and

In recognition of the wide-reaching impact she had on patient safety in Norwegian health care and beyond, Dr. Mellin-Olsen was awarded the highest civilian honor in Norway (Knight 1st Class of The Royal Order of St. Olav). She also received the Distinguished Service Award from the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA), where she served as President between 2018–2020.

Upon her untimely passing, tributes were paid across social media with comments such as:

“With your inspiring leadership and kind support in our training programmes, you and I have witnessed the number of anesthesia providers grow from 18 to 2,700 in the 40 years in both Ethiopia and Eritrea.”

“With your proactive inspiring support, the untimely death of mothers and children from preventable obstetric and pediatric emergencies has decreased from grave level to WHO commendable levels.”

“I was saddened to hear about the recent passing of Jannicke Mellin-Olsen, whose dedication to patient safety touched so many lives. Her commitment and compassion will always be remembered. I had the privilege of hearing her speak at the Ellison C. Pierce, Jr, MD, Memorial Lecture in Philadelphia and was moved by her story and passion.”

“Her contributions to the WFSA and the field of anesthesiology have left a lasting impact, inspiring generations of professionals worldwide. Her legacy will endure through the countless lives she touched and the advancements she championed.”

- Being the first non-American member of the Board of the Patient Safety Movement Foundation.

In her many leadership positions, Dr. Mellin-Olsen committed to eliminating preventable deaths in hospitals and was recognised as a champion of nonpunitive approaches to medical errors. She was particularly committed to human factors solutions, and always promoted communication, open disclosure, and cooperation between all stakeholders, from politicians to patients and relatives, clinical staff, industry partners and hospital managers, all with the aim of improved patient safety. She was regarded as a highly experienced interlocutor between anesthesia professionals and other medical specialties and always sought consensus as a means of attaining objectives and achieving progress.

Dr. Mellin-Olsen’s inspirational career was celebrated at the 18th World Congress of Anaesthesiologists in Singapore in March 2024, where she was one of two Harold Griffith lecturers, delivering the only named plenary

lecture of the World Congress to a standing ovation by the 1,700+ strong in-person audience. Gracious as always, she generously agreed for the lecture to be made publicly available.

Dr. Jannicke Mellin-Olsen carried out these activities and roles on a voluntary basis while working as a consultant anesthesiologist at Baerum Hospital, demonstrating her selfless work in the service of humanity.

Please join us honoring her legacy by continuing to strive for safer anesthesia care.

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The author has no conflicts of interest.