

# OPENING ADDRESS



Colonel, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

First of all, I have to thank Major-General Laaneots, Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces for having willingly accepted to support the 10<sup>th</sup> International Military Mental Health Conference.

We are also very grateful to the Commander of the National Defence College, Colonel Ermus, for hosting the conference in the facilities of the National Defence College and to support us in fulfilling all our practical needs to make this conference a success.

Furthermore, there is no way of organizing an event of this size without a number of coworkers. We need of course a local conference organizer who coordinates all activities, who takes care of a professionally challenging meeting and of exciting social events. But there are also a lot of “work horses” acting behind the scenes who make sure that everything runs smoothly. So, many thanks to Merle Tihaste and to all the “unknown soldiers”, for what you have already done and for what you will do for us the coming days.

Today, you see before you an especially happy chairman of the International Steering Committee because, as all you know from the label “10<sup>th</sup> IMMh” and from the invitation, we celebrate our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, an anniversary covers more than a time interval in rounded figures. Over the past decade the IMMh conference has grown from a small tripartite meeting between British, American and Dutch mental health professionals of the Armed Forces in Europe to become a broad international forum. Today we have more than 60 participants from 15 countries, spread over four continents.

Meanwhile we have created our identity, translated into a mission statement, and we have found our place amidst a huge number of other conferences and workshops. The growing participation rate over the years is proof that we fill a gap, in dealing with military mental health.

Indeed, our strength is the interdisciplinary collaboration between actors who contribute to the physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of the soldier. This is especially relevant in an operational setting because “who feels well, works well” to quote from the motto of the Australian Psychological Service. We are also probably the only International Conference Community that applies concretely the motto “mens sana in corpore sano” through the IMMh running club. But Jamie Hacker-Hughes, the initiator of it will tell you more about that later on today.

On the other side, given that all crisis response operations have become multiservice, multinational in an intercultural environment, it is important to bring those experiences from the field together in an international forum,

aiming at elaborating “guidelines for best practice”. That is the reason why this meeting does not consist only of a series of presentations but also of workshops and of free time to get to know each other better and to engage in discussions on topics of personal professional interest.

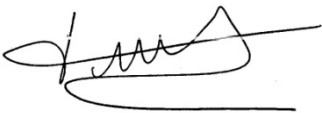
Last but not least we all should be aware that, as experts, we are there to assist the commanders and thus that we also have to listen to the “voices of the field”.

Let us also say a few words about the leading theme of this conference: *Medically unexplained physical symptoms are perhaps psychologically explainable*; in short: *MUPS are perhaps PEPS*.

Indeed, a lot of soldiers show a number of complaints and are no longer able to perform well but they cannot be diagnosed as suffering from a particular syndrome, disease or disorder. This may have negative consequences on several levels; among others: professionally, psychologically, socially and financially. I truly believe that we have brought together here the right mix of competencies to address the phenomenon from different points of view. And whenever you feel challenged by the subject after this conference, you know that there is an NATO exploratory team of the Human Factors and Medicine panel on MUPS chaired by one of the keynote speakers of today, Col Dr Eric Vermetten.

To conclude: The French politician Clemenceau claimed that *war was too important to be left to the generals*. Simon Wessely contended that *research is too important to be left to the scientists only*. I would like to add to that, that *MUPS are too important to be left to the medics only*.

I wish each of you a very enriching meeting and a nice stay in Tartu!



Prof Dr Jacques Mylle  
Chairman IMMHC