



Interview with Marie Nordström

Marie Nordström, DDS and PhD student at Malmö University Dental School, was recently awarded a grant of almost EUR 160,000 from Eklund Foundation. DDS Michaela von Geijer from TePe met up with Marie Nordström to learn some more about her project, “Salutogenesis against the odds – resilience factors among adolescents”.

Congratulations! How does it feel to receive this grant from Eklund Foundation?

– Thank you! I'm very glad to have received the grant from Eklund Foundation. It's a great honour of course, and a great opportunity to have received it already as a PhD student. I also think it's very important that research with a salutogenic approach is given this attention because we do need to move away from a traditional pathogenic approach if we want to achieve sustainable results.

The grant you receive, almost 160,000 euros, is record-high in the five-year history of Eklund Foundation. Why do you think that your research is of such great interest?

– I think it's of interest because we're still not able to reduce health inequalities, and normally, we ask what creates disease, but if we instead ask what creates health, perhaps we can shift the focus and achieve sustainable results, and also achieve results in general health.

Despite the fact that we have free dental care in Sweden, we do not succeed in making children caries-free in vulnerable areas. Is this a global problem? Do you think it looks the same in other parts of the world?

– Well, it is a global problem because dental caries is associated with socioeconomic status, and this means that those in disadvantaged groups, such as with low income or low educational level have worse health, and that's not only in oral health but also in general health. This can be seen in high-income countries, such as here in Sweden, but also in low- and middle-income countries.

So many factors could affect the development of caries nowadays. Do you already have some thoughts on what factors are in play for those who don't get caries despite living in vulnerable areas?

– Yes, there have been major changes in our lifestyles and shifts also in our diet, and there are some studies on health factors, but not many of them are made in disadvantaged populations.



– For example, family factors are important, such as, if the parents value meals and food and oral hygiene habits, or if there's a supportive home environment where it's easy to make healthy choices. There could also be a positive influence from social interactions, from friends, media and school. Oral habits are also connected with something called sense of coherence, which basically is how well we can cope, understand and manage challenges in life.

Can you tell us how this project will be conducted? What's your starting point?

– We have planned for four studies with different study methods, all exploring health promotive factors. The first study is a systematic review on common protective factors, and for the second study, we will interview healthy adolescents here in Skåne. The third study will look at a larger population and combine quality registers with questionnaires, and the fourth study will be conducted in another country.

– We already have a promising collaboration with a group of researchers from South Africa. It's an interesting country for our research because it has the highest economic inequality in the world, which means that there's a huge gap between rich and poor. We're hoping to conduct a pilot study next year that can be developed into a larger study later on.

It's always satisfying to see your research coming to practical use. How do you think the results of your study can benefit society, dentistry or the individual?

– If we can find out what creates health among some individuals, despite having difficult circumstances in life, that's something we can use in health promotion, and instead of having short-term interventions, we can shift the focus and power to the individual. Maybe there are ways where we can empower them, to strengthen their own abilities and assets, and use resources in life to maintain health. In this way, we can achieve more sustainable results that can also have effects on general health. It's also knowledge that we can use in collaboration with other professions.

The Eklund Foundation was established in 2015 to support research and education in the odontological field. It rests on a donation of MSEK 50 by the Eklund family, owners of the Swedish company TePe Oral Hygiene Products. More information is available at eklundfoundation.org.