

# Sustaining vulnerable lives

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Patient safety is a hot topic in the U.S., Australia and Europe. Large resources are set aside for research projects that will make life safer for patients. In Norway, the research field is still new – but researchers from Stavanger are in the forefront.

"Until about five years ago the Norwegian health care system had a low focus on safety and risk management compared with other high-risk sectors", says Professor Karina Aase at the University of Stavanger.

Together with her colleagues, she has concluded that there is an under-reporting of adverse events in Norwegian hospitals and that the culture of safety and risk awareness can be improved.

"Patient safety is becoming an issue that people are concerned about, and the patients themselves have become more conscious of how they are treated," Aase says.

The professor has experienced how a new field of research has been put on the agenda in [Norway](#). For Karina Aase and the research team the process started when the Stavanger University Hospital (SUS) in 2004 initiated a collaboration project on patient safety. Director Stein Tore Nilsen at the SUS and Dean Marit Boyesen at the Faculty of Social Sciences facilitated the "birth" of the research program.

Professor of Risk Management, Terje Aven at UiS, and Professor MD. Eldar Søreide at SUS were central in the first phase of what would become a robust research program on patient safety.

## **Momentum and timing**

"We had the momentum from the outset with the four PhD candidates Karianne Eidesen, Siri Wiig, Espen Olsen and Stephen Sollid, who, together with their supervisors, represented the core of the research program", Aase says.

In 2005, UiS, SUS and Laerdal Medical AS established Stavanger Acute medicine Foundation for Education and Research, SAFER, to increase the competence of healthcare professionals and students by means of simulation and training. This was an important building block according to Aase.

In addition, the Laerdal Foundation has funded several research fellows in patient safety and simulation during the last five years.

"The already established collaboration on risk and safety research across the faculty of social sciences and the faculty of science and technology was also an important prerequisite. With our experience with safety research within the petroleum industry and within transportation, we wanted to move into a new sector", Aase says.

"We had momentum from the start that was easy to build on. With funding from UiS, SUS, Helse Vest and the Laerdal Foundation, we got a research group that was robust from day one. We were also lucky with the timing. Patient safety had become an issue in the public debate", Aase says.

## **Doors open**

In 2008 Karina Aase took over the leadership of the patient safety research group with her new professorship in safety at the Department

of Health Studies at UiS, contributing to an even closer link to the practice field.

"The next step was to apply for research funding within the EU 7th Framework Programme", Aase says. In 2010, the research group at UiS was granted funding for the research project, Quality and Safety in the European Union Hospitals (QUASER).

The QUASER project is concerned with what the hospitals in [Europe](#) can do to improve quality and patient safety and how governments can evaluate and make sure that this happens.

Aase and the research group have recently also been granted funding from the Norwegian Research Council to the project Quality and Safety within Elderly Health and Care Services, where they will focus on quality and safety in treatment and care of the elderly.

The research team has furthermore established a partnership with Helse Førde that has been granted funding for a doctoral scholarship from the Helse Vest linked to the new project.

Aase is pleased to see that so many doors have opened up for research on patient safety looking forward to exciting activities in the years to come.

"Our next goals will, in addition to the focus on hospitals, be to address patient safety in primary health care, patient experiences, patient handovers between care providers, interdisciplinary teams and the use of simulation for improving [patient safety](#). And we will conduct comparative studies between Norway and other countries", she says.

Provided by University of Stavanger

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