Socioeconomic inequalities in health

Research on health inequalities within populations has developed rapidly over the last 10-15 years, revealing a persistent and uniform pattern of health differentials across the social spectrum. Although the details may vary from country to country, the overall picture shows social gradients in mortality and subjective health remarkably stable over the years and across national borders. The challenge now is to explain this phenomenon by investigating the many possible mechanisms in producing and reproducing social inequalities in health. A further challenge is to formulate efficient policies to reduce inequity in health.

In 2001 two international conferences in Norway addressed these problems: the conference *Making a difference – social inequalities in health* at Gardermoen May 14-16 and the 16. Nordic Conference in Social Medicine & Public Health: *Social inequality and inequity in health* in Bergen August 16-19.

This issue of the Norwegian Journal of Epidemiology was born out of these meetings. As in other developed countries, the notion of persisting and important social inequalities in health has been increasing in Norway. The time is ripe to get an overview of the status of this field in our country. We therefore invited a number of the Norwegian presenters at the conferences and other Norwegian researchers to submit papers for a special issue on socioeconomic inequalities in health. The result is a blend of review papers, methodological studies, empirical findings and policy discussion papers. Since the majority of the papers were written in the English language we hope that this issue will also be of interest for the international scientific community.

We thank each of the contributing authors and hope that they are satisfied with the final result. We also express our thanks to the Editor for inviting us to act as guest editors for this issue and for his gentle and efficient way of guiding us through the process.

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