This second edition of *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health* (NJACH) is being published at a time when the world is struggling with the COVID-19 virus and this editorial is written while national resources across the world have been put to use to combat the pandemic and to treat the sick. Health professionals are applauded and respect is shown for those who are risking their lives working long hours to treat and accommodate the needs of the growing number of severely ill and dying patients.

In times of illness and stress, people are often deprived of social connection, which in turn may lead to further stress. The current situation is causing mental health challenges for many people. Counter to other public health strategies, social distancing is now enforced as a new public health strategy, the media across the world is reporting that increasing numbers of people are feeling lonely and afraid, children are suffering, domestic abuse is on the rise and many people have lost their jobs and their livelihoods and are living in uncertainty.

In times of difficulty and strife such as these, the arts have always been used to express the human condition and to create a sense of connection and meaning. Over the past months, people all over the world have used song and dance to connect with each other, lift spirits and boost morale. We have also seen hospital staff singing for patients who are being deprived of visits from friends and relatives. These initiatives have gone viral on social media and people involved feel that it has enabled them to feel a sense of hope, connection and optimism. At a time where participatory arts programmes are suspended and cultural institutions are closed, artists across the world have also found new, inspiring and innovative ways of producing and sharing arts experiences. A few examples demonstrate the richness and power of these creative encounters: Within days of the lockdown, visual artists, dancers and theatre practitioners were adamantly expressing that the show must go…online. Musicians are staging live concerts from their balconies — a trend that seemingly started in Italy — and from their living rooms, museums are providing livestreamed guided tours, choirs have been established both online and from balconies and windows, and the popular CPH:DOX film festival in Denmark went online. In dementia care, clowns have invented new methods of meeting our most vulnerable citizens, and in Norway, the clowns (Klokkeklovnene) are...
cleaning the windows and arranging garden parties to ease the social isolation and to provide joy and laughter for the residents this spring and summer. The response to these new initiatives has been overwhelming, showing that not only are such activities intrinsic to being human, they are also a contributing factor to our health and wellbeing, enabling us to connect, find self-expression and make sense of our lives and times. As Nietzsche wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is when we are faced with the most dreadful experiences that “art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about horrors or absurdities of existence into notions with which we can live” (1967: 60).

With hindsight, we will be able to better understand what role the arts have played in these trying times, and hopefully our readers will feel encouraged to make contributions in this direction. What we do know with certainty is that the ancient tradition of using all the arts (drama, movement, poetry, literature, visual art, music) to address issues of health and wellbeing is re-emerging across the world, something to which this journal bears witness. In this issue we are pleased to present four articles, one essay and two reviews showing the variety of arts and health practices from very different perspectives. The articles published in this issue come from established and emerging researchers in the field and reveal the broad variety of texts that we have received over the past months.

In a mixed methods study, Riisbøl and Timmermann explore patients’, relatives’ and nurses’ perspectives on how an observation room at a department of cardiology can be redecorated and designed with an emphasis on care for and well-being of patients and their relatives. The study highlights three themes as being especially meaningful for improved care and well-being when designing an observation room in a hospital, namely: The ambience of the room (music, wall decorations, colors), the presence of nature, and privacy.

In a qualitative study, Hämäläinen, Musial, Graff, Schirmer, Salamonsen and Mehus explore the use of yoik (the traditional vocal art of the Sami, the indigenous people of Fennoscandia) in an in-care context in Norway. The study ‘The art of yoik in care: Sami caregivers’ experiences in dementia care in Northern Norway’ explores an underresearched topic with regard to the consequences of colonisation and assimilation within healthcare services, and considers the benefits of using yoik in person-centred care.

Saarikallio, Stensæth, Horwitz, Ekholm and Bonde have surveyed musicians across the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) to investigated music professionals’ (music teachers, music therapists, musicians, academics) health, with a particular interest in the uses of music as a resource for the musicians’ own psychological health. The article ‘Music as a resource for psychological health for music professionals: A Nordic survey’ enhances the understanding of how music can simultaneously function as a profession and a health resource.

In the final research article, Lea, Hansen and Synnes explore the value of dementia-friendly guided tours at a museum in Norway. The focus of the article is on describing and analysing what is happening in the interactions between artworks, the arts facilitator and people with a dementia diagnosis. This article demonstrates that these meetings are co-creative, providing the persons with dementia the opportunity to influence how we understand and interpret our common cultural heritage. The authors suggest that participation and collaboration at the art museum can be a way for persons with dementia to exercise their cultural citizenship.

In the notes from the field section, Emma Lundemark has written a personal essay sharing some of her experiences from an ongoing theatre project for service users at a psychiatric ward in Stockholm. The essay provides insights into the process of making and sharing a
devised theatre performance with an audience. In this issue, we also include two reviews connected to the World Health Organization’s report on Art and Health: *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review* that was published in November 2019. Liisa Laitinen has provided a summary of the launch event in Finland while Stephen Clift has reviewed the WHO report itself. Clift’s review welcomes the report, but casts a critical eye over the methodology used and questions the value of the report for health commissioners. Hopefully this review will contribute to the ongoing debates and discourses around the strengths and limitations of arts and health research and the fundamental question of what represents evidence in this field. Both the WHO report and Clift’s review of the report petition for more robust and larger-scale studies to investigate the benefits of arts and health initiatives. We only hope that the time has now come for large-scale funding to support truly cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary research that can develop our understanding of the many ways in which art (in all its forms) can support our health and wellbeing.

**Reference**