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Estonia's Doctor of the Year 2020 is Alice Lill

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"I see this as recognition of the daily work of doctors of internal medicine, and not only with regard to the COVID situation – internists in many Estonian hospitals are currently facing a lot of pressure," says Dr Alice Lill. "It is always nice to be recognised, especially considering the complicated situation we have been in this year." "It gives more responsibility and hopefully the chance to have a say on some of the bottleneck issues related to internal medicine," finds Dr Lill.

"The important message here is that internal medicine is the area being recognised, as hospitals are currently experiencing extraordinary workloads in addition to COVID. Patients in the internal medicine department are severely ill; every recovery brings joy to loved ones and we hear warm words from patients as well as friends and family. Patients in the COVID department are currently sending letters to us and we receive many thank you notes and good wishes. Even those who were once sceptical of the existence of the virus now understand that this is a serious illness. Unfortunately, the treatment of severely ill patients also comes with loss, pain and death – loved ones often find this unexpected and irreconcilable. We have to do a lot of explaining and listening and deliver unpleasant messages. End-of-life topics deserve a lot more discussion and explanation in Estonia."

The Doctor of the Year says that she does not find herself in difficult situations, just situations where solutions are difficult to find – these situations occur in both the process of department management as well as the treatment of patients. Years of experience help Dr Lill cope with difficult situations. Time also sometimes works in her favour as well as repeated explanations when communicating with patients. "It is important to find solutions regardless of the situation," says Dr Lill.

Dr Eero Merilind, Chairman of the Board of the Estonian Health Foundation, describes 2020 as a difficult year that really put the functioning of the healthcare system to the test. "We chose Dr Alice Lill, Head of the COVID Department of East Tallinn Central Hospital, who works with severely ill coronavirus patients on a daily basis and whose knowledge and hard work has saved many lives, as Doctor of the Year for 2020."

Dr Lill completed her residency in internal medicine in 2001. After that, she worked as a senior doctor in the Department of Internal Medicine of North Estonia Medical Centre from 2001-2012.

In 2012, Dr Lill was asked to join the East Tallinn Central Hospital Department of Internal Medicine where she started off as a doctor and was promoted to head of the department/centre in 2013.

Patients and colleagues had the right to put forward candidates for the title of Doctor of the Year. Doctor of the Year was selected by the readers of the portal of medical news www.arst.ee and a jury comprised of the Minister of Social Affairs Tanel Kiik, general practitioner Eero Meriling and Head of Research of the Centre of Cardiology of the North Estonia Medical Centre professor Margus Viigimaa.

SA Eesti Tervise Fond [Estonian Health Foundation] was established on 25 May 2007 with the aim to improve the health of the Estonian population, prolong the active period of life, promote a healthy lifestyle and share health information.