



Winter Conference 2023

16 & 17 November 2023

Opening Address by Dr Lorcan Martin, College President

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to our Winter Conference for 2023. It seems like no time at all since I was issuing a welcome to our Spring conference. Time is passing faster and it is not all down to the ageing process. All our lives have become busier and more stressful and it says a lot that so many people have made time to attend this conference. We hope you will find it worthwhile and I would like to thank Professor Mary Cannon, the Conference Academic Committee and College Team for putting together such an interesting, varied and stimulating programme.

I would like to say that the landscape of the psychiatrist has changed dramatically since I last addressed you but, sadly, this is not the case. We continue to face the challenges of limited resources, public negativity and seemingly unworkable legislation and regulation. The ongoing attempts to erode the role of the Consultant are disheartening but we will not be relegated the side lines. We are psychiatrists. We do not treat psychological distress or the bumps and bruises of daily life. As experts, we assess and manage moderate to severe mental illness in a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary way. It is what we are trained to do, it is what we are paid to do and, occasionally even, what we are resourced to do. I defy anyone to look at the Medical Council register of specialties and find any mention of mental health! Psychiatry and psychiatrists are not dirty words. Like our colleagues in other medical specialties, we are happy to offer our expert advice for development of policy and strategy, even if we have to bang loudly on the doors of power to get that opportunity. But make no mistake – we are not a walk-in service, nor are we counsellors or shoulders on which to cry. We are medical specialists and we must not surrender that role.

On a more optimistic note, later today will see the graduation of those who have completed their Higher Specialist Training. It is encouraging to see so many fine young psychiatrists coming on stream and I hope many of you will ensure the bright future of the College and our profession.

The past year has seen the College more active than ever and with a renewed energy to our Faculties. We have met with key stakeholders including the Minister for Mental Health, the Mental Health Commission and the Ombudsman for Children and, indeed, will meet him and his Team again next week. We also met with the Irish College of General Practitioners to discuss the issues related to social media posts regarding psychiatrists and psychiatry but, more importantly, the many areas in which our two bodies can cooperate. Following on from this, it is anticipated that a number of initiatives will develop. The Council met with the Chair of the implementation committee for Sharing the Vision to highlight concerns, provide feedback and offer suggestions as to how the policy can be made to work for secondary care services. Members continue to represent us on a number of important groups and at vital bodies such as the Citizens' Assembly and, only two days ago, Professor Siobhan MacHale and



Drs. Eric Kelleher and Anita Ambikapathy appeared before the Joint Committee on Assisted Dying; I would direct you to our website where you will find a link to this session. If College members did not take time out of their busy schedules to engage in these activities, our voice simply would not be heard and we are grateful to them.

Our media profile continues to expand hugely in the capable hands of the EAP Department. The College presence in print and broadcast media has grown considerably. Since our Spring conference, the College has issued ten press statements. It has appeared in 75 online news items, 34 printed news items, 44 radio items and 2 television appearances. Most recently, for the month of October, Spin South West devoted their Saturday guest slots to interviews with College members about various aspects of psychiatry. It was gratifying to hear from the presenter that there had been a spike in podcast listenership for these segments and these podcasts are now available on our website. Importantly, two listeners texted the presenter to say they had sought assessment on foot of the presentations. We will continue to expand this range of podcasts in the new year. Additionally, the presenter plans to turn the interviews into a documentary – The Real Psychiatrists of Herbert Street does have a certain ring to it!

Other aspects of the educational role of our College have also grown. We have had a number of insightful and successful public meetings with branches of the Irish Farmers' Association in various parts of the country. These meetings have highlighted the at times worrying level of psychiatric morbidity in Ireland's rural community but have been exceptionally well-received by attendees and have also allowed the College to connect with people on the ground and encourage lobbying of their local representatives. More meetings of this type are planned. If you think such a meeting might work in your own area with the IFA or similar local organisation, do talk to us. We are also in the process of arranging a mini-conference on Traveller Mental Health in conjunction with Kerry Travellers Health & Community Development Project and it is hoped that this may be replicated in other areas. We have also had speakers at the now annual Change Your Mind festival in Sligo.

The various Faculties continue to develop responses to ongoing issues and to make recommendations to Council and Management. We are grateful for their hard work and to those members who respond to requests for feedback or input. We would encourage as many people as possible to engage with these processes in order to inform the College as it moves into the future.

In spite of ongoing under-resourcing, the Department of Post-Graduate Training goes from strength to strength. Exams will now take place three times a year, a curriculum review is in progress and new initiatives such as Simulation and Entrustable Professional Activities are being developed. We are grateful to those who have taken part in exams, standard setting, etc. but there is always room for more at that particular inn. Repeatedly, we have heard that the work force plan for the future is that there would be an emphasis on developing training posts and reducing the reliance on non-training posts. Equally repeatedly, we say we are ready to meet that challenge but not without the required resources. You do not train a Specialist on good will and aspiration. However, on the subject of good will, I would like to thank our Educational Supervisors, Tutors and Vice-Deans for their hard work and also draw attention to



an exciting new event. On December 1st, we will see the first Educational Supervisors' conference and we have been delighted with the response, so far. Before leaving the subject of Post-Graduate Training, I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Aoibhinn Lynch, Kellie and the whole team.

The ever-reliable and ever-busy Professional Competence Department continues to produce high quality CPD activities including Hot Topics, Special Seminars and webinars dealing with issues of significant interest such as the Assisted Decision Making Capacity Act. The online format allows for ease of access to a greater number of people and the most recent Navigating the Consultant Landscape Special Seminar (free to members, I might add) attracted several hundred attendees. As always, the PCS Department provides invaluable support to us as we strive to maintain competence and remains engaged with the Medical Council regarding the repeatedly promised new Framework for Professional Competence.

If you are sitting there thinking that I am just listing off all the College and its members have been up to, then you are dead right. It is important to recognise the incredible work that has been done. Whether it is taking part in a working group or committee, assisting with exams or training or representing us in broadcast or print media, it all matters. We cannot make a difference without your contributions and we thank you.

Also, on a happier note, the refurbishment of our building in Herbert Street is finally drawing to a close. I would like to thank Miriam, our CEO, for the extraordinary work she has put into this. I would also like to express appreciation to our previous Treasurer, Dr. Mike Scully, for his contribution and, while on the subject, welcome Dr. Mary O'Hanlon as our new Treasurer. We will soon be able to invite members to join us in your College headquarters, whether it be for a Faculty or Special Interest Group meeting, a presentation in our new auditorium with state of the art audio-visual equipment or simply to meet colleagues for a chat and a cup of your chosen caffeine.

You may have heard me use the tag #itsaboutpeople on a number of occasions. This is to emphasise that, for all the legislation, regulation and any other -ation, psychiatry is about people. It is about our patients for whom we do our best, often in the face of significant odds; it is about their carers whom we strive to educate and support; it is about our teams, whom we lead and also support. Finally, it is about ourselves – and if we do not look after ourselves and each other, we cannot do any of the other things. We recently highlighted the significant concern in relation to doctor burnout in our pre-Budget submission and it was picked up in both print and broadcast media. Professor Fiona McNicholas presented worrying data on this matter at our last Spring Conference and again at the recent RCPsychNI conference. #itsaboutpeople will now become a campaign and a repository of resources on line, beginning with the aforementioned podcasts and expanding over time with items of interest to both public and professionals focussing on the human dimension of psychiatry. Needless to say, if members have suggestions for adding to this, we would love to hear from you - #andrewantsevenmorework – we would also love to add videos of patients and carers talking about positive experiences of psychiatric services, so please do keep that in mind!



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Finally – and you may now breathe a hefty sigh of relief – I would like to thank everyone involved in the organisation of this conference and all our speakers and chairs. I know from experience how much work goes into it and it is far from inconsiderable. I would like to wish you all an interesting and enjoyable time and I look forward to seeing you over the next two days.

I will now hand you over to Drs. Myles Barrett & Fizna Fysal who will chair our first session.

And remember #itsaboutpeople