



**Dr Miriam Kennedy, Director of Communication and Public Education
External Affairs & Policy (EAP) Department**

Dear Colleagues,

It seems just yesterday since our Winter Conference! Yet a lot has been happening in the EAP department of the College perhaps most especially in two of its key objectives: **Improving the understanding of Psychiatry and Mental Health and Advocating for improvements in the quality of mental healthcare throughout all sectors of society.** At our last conference, membership feedback to us via a workshop and online questionnaire noted the sheer complexity of the many roles a psychiatrist finds himself/herself undertaking every day. This dialogue with members 'what it is to be a psychiatrist in 2017 and beyond' is ongoing and will take the shape of a variety of forums and interactions over the next 12 months.



As part of our objective to improve the understanding of psychiatry, following liaison with the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Ó Fearghail TD, we developed and held two **education sessions for Oireachtas members and staff at Leinster House in February.** Topics covered over two mornings were: What is mental illness; Treatments; How the Services work with a focus on the General Adult, Child & Adolescent, and Later Life psychiatry; Suicide and Self-harm; and Self Care.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Future of Mental Health Care:



Dr John Hillery, Dr Miriam Kennedy, Dr Roisin Plunkett (Trainee Committee Chair) and Ms Miriam Silke (College CEO) addressed the committee on 7th March 2018, on the issue of recruitment and retention of psychiatrists and trainee psychiatrists

to Mental Health Services. The College's comments were well received with Committee Chair, Senator Joan Freeman, stating "I am so much more clear about this problem of recruitment...the HSE has basically been saying that we can't recruit anybody, we're hearing why today... Thank you so much... It was an astounding meeting."

'Recovery': Embracing the Challenges – Approach for Psychiatry?: The College, supported by the HSE and Advanced Recovery Ireland (ARI), ran a one day workshop for College members only in both Limerick and Dublin. This workshop provided College members with a comprehensive overview of the

recovery approach to practice, the evidence to support it, and an opportunity to shape the College's policy position.



Masterclass for Oireachtas Members:

The College ran two masterclasses on 21st February and 7th March with members and staff of the Oireachtas on mental illness, the services, and treatments. Many TD's and Senators feel ill-equipped to attend to constituents in distress and these sessions aimed to address this.

We welcomed the openness of our public leaders to educate themselves on the nature of mental illness; its effects; on treatments and how to access them (where appropriate and where not); as well as alternative options - so that we utilize our resources and skills to the benefit of the patient suffering from mental illness and their families. The sessions were productive and interactive but succeeded in all of us improving understanding and perceptions of the other. We cannot underestimate their different expectations driven by not fully knowing the area, and what our role is. As the Ceann Comhairle stressed, this is the beginning of a process and relationship with the College, which we all hope to build on with the aim of enhancing the understanding of mental illness, services and our role as psychiatrists. I thank my colleagues, Drs Ciaran Corcoran, Rachael Cullivan, Siobhán MacHale, Anne Jeffers and Profs Greg Swanwick and Fiona McNicholas, for their time, effective short presentations and answer sessions, and to Dr John Hillery, our President, for the initiative in the first place. Thanks also to our REFOCUS members who helped represent the College at both sessions.

We held two well attended workshops, also in February, on the Recovery Ethos, which were supported by the HSE and ARI (Advance Recovery Ireland) and which will help shape a College position paper in development by Dr Dominic Fannon. The feedback from delegates was very positive with members highlighting the roundtable discussions as particularly useful and enjoyable. This is part of a collaborative process where we hope that College members can contribute to policy formation through practical CPD accredited workshops like this.

The College was also invited to attend a meeting of the **Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Mental Healthcare** to discuss recruitment and retention. This afforded us another opportunity to explain what psychiatry is and how psychiatrists work. Dr John Hillery, Dr Roisin Plunkett (Chair Trainee committee), Ms Miriam Silke (CE), and I sat on the panel with the

committee. The committee was complimentary about the clear information we provided but particularly the practical and achievable solutions we suggested. The video of the proceedings was emailed to all members and is available on the College website.

Media: We have spoken to a variety of journalists both in national and medical press. Of note is an article in the Irish Examiner focusing on PTSD while featuring the Stardust tragedy anniversary. This type of article provides our profession with an opportunity to give understandable and compassionate information on treatments, approaches, and so on, while raising the understanding of how we work to the benefit of our patients.

Prime Time special on 'Carers in Crisis':



Dr John Hillery appeared on this specially extended programme of RTÉ Prime Time to discuss the thousands of people all over the country who spend virtually their entire lives caring for loved ones who are unable to care for themselves. The show caused much comment and empathy and Dr Hillery wrote a follow up piece in the Sunday Independent advocating for continued support for carers stating;

"[It is] time to stop talking and start spending to help our carers".



Dr Miriam Kennedy speaks to Irish Examiner about PTSD in article about

Stardust tragedy: Dr Kennedy pointed out that immediate debriefing after a trauma may not be helpful because "there are reasons why people deal with things in what we call 'their own time', when their mind can process it." She continues:

"It isn't about an immediate, 'one size fits all' or imposed form of treatment,"

"The need for support is vital, but people need support in different

ways. Some people respond to trauma in a stoic way and it isn't necessarily always a case of 'better out than in'."



Press coverage following presentation to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Future of Mental Health Care: The College

presentation to the Joint Committee received coverage in the Medical Independent which highlighted the College's requested 10% increase in basic specialist training (BST) places for 2018. It reported that a 5% increase only was accorded to the College.

I am acutely aware that you as members have expertise and run services we may not always be in a position to reflect sufficiently. With this in mind, we have asked for volunteers who can be called on at short notice to give short information, presentations or interviews in the public domain on their key areas of expertise. If this is something of interest to you please let me, Andrea, or Mary know of your availability for the next six months. We will provide advice/short training sessions on communication with media which hopefully will provide the comfort zone some of us lack in order to put ourselves out there to advocate on behalf of the services and our profession.

I look forward to seeing some of you at the session on professionalism at the Spring Conference as part of our ongoing dialogue on the role of the consultant psychiatrists.

Enjoy the conference and hope to see you there!

Miriam

Please contact me directly on eapdirector@irishpsychiatry.ie or the College EAP Team Andrea Ryder, Manager (andrea@irishpsychiatry.ie) and Mary Hayes, Communications and Policy Officer (mhayes@irishpsychiatry.ie).

EAP Committee Reports Activity

Human Rights & Ethics Committee

Chair: Dr Pauline Twomey

Continuing work on College *Code of Ethics for Psychiatry* and developing training in HR&E for trainees and professional competence.

REFOCUS CPSYCHI - Recovery Experience Forum of Carers & Users of the services

Joint Chairs: Dr Anne Jeffers and Ms Christine McCabe

- Election of new Joint Chair
- Involvement in Accreditation Process
- Plenary Presentation at NCHD Conference
- Draft paper - 'Family Dynamics: ensuring psychiatrists & mental health teams address family dynamics'
- Mind Reading – Mental Health and the Written Word

Law Committee

Chair: Dr Mike Scully

Committee provided a College submission on the Preliminary Draft Heads of Bill on Deprivation of Liberty – Safeguard Proposals.

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