

21st National Health Summit

Putting health at the heart of every policy

The health of our society is fundamental to our economy, and investing in healthcare and systems is essential for our future

QUINTON O'REILLY

With the 21st National Health Summit back in its home in Croke Park on February 6, its current form is a long way from its inaugural event back in 2004.

The chair of the summit, Audrey Carville, journalist and host of RTÉ Radio 1's Morning Ireland, welcomed everyone, commenting on both the packed agenda and the large attendance, saying it was "another milestone reached for this summit which is really growing and developing every single year".

Before the session started proper, Celine McPhillips from the Irish Heart Foundation took the stage and guided the audience through a two-minute exercise as part of the 'Escape Your Chair' initiative. McPhillips had everyone moving their arms, legs and bodies to the tune of the Bee Gees' Stayin' Alive.

With the audience warmed up, it was time for Dr Ronan Glynn, partner and health sector lead at EY Ireland, to speak about how essential it is to invest in healthcare for the long-term, saying it will require a fundamental change in how we address our current and future problems. He started with the question of what we want for our citizens.

Values and choices

"We need to take these values and explore the potential futures, and ask what a better future for healthcare in Ireland might be," he said. "The choices we face are not binary, it's not a case of steady progression and incremental change versus radical transformation."

"If we're collectively in this room to leave a legacy and want to be able to access the healthcare we need in 15 or 20 years' time, then we need to do all three."

This set the context for the international keynote on creating a new narrative for investing in health and health systems delivered by Dr Tracey Cooper, chief executive of Public Health Wales. With prevention the aim of the game, she spoke about how Wales changed its mindset to help improve its health services.

"To tackle all of this – as the health of society is fundamental to economic and fiscal sustainability – it is about having health in all policies," she explained. "Not just housing, education, local government, climate, but all policies in health."

"In Wales, we have a Wellbeing of Future Generations Act... so decisions made by public bodies have to be long-term, and made with prevention [in mind]. It's a brilliant piece of public health legislation and it's all about culture change, a mindset across government and multi-agency public services."

This tied in with the first panel discussion of the day on what healthcare needs from the new government which included Dr Marie Ó Mir, chief executive of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists, Gabrielle Collieran, president of the Irish Hospital Consultants Association, Micheala Hagenhofer, general manager for Johnson & Johnson innovative medicine, and Pascal Derrien, chief executive of Migraine Ireland.

Collieran spoke about the duty of educating the public on health matters, saying that while it's not the most exciting topic, it's important in the long run.

"There are a lot of people who don't know the link between obesity and heart disease, and cancer, and stroke and when we look at the leading causes of death, they're right there," she said.

"Public health is not sexy so it's really hard to get everyone invested in it. Everyone wants the new fancy cancer drug, it's really exciting but that is so high-cost." Hagenhofer mentioned the importance



Isabelle Francois, director of innovation, Medvia.be, Flanders, Belgium; Una Kearns, founder and chief executive, myPatientSpace; Maria McCann, head of practice data & digital solutions and organisational psychologist, Project Foundry; Neil O'Hare, chief information officer, professor of Health Informatics UCD, digital health department, Children's Health Ireland; Orla Gogarty, director of digital health, transformation and partnerships, St Patrick's mental health services, and Sarah-Jane O'Dwyer, founder and chief executive, IntuVu Health

Pictures: Maura Hickey



Dr Lynda Keaveney, chief clinical officer, Vhi Health and Wellbeing; Thomas Sharkey, sales director, Oracle Health; Eimear Caslin, general manager, GSK; Shay Cloherty, managing director, iQuest & Business Post; Micheala Hagenhofer, general manager, Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine; Dr Ronan Glynn, partner and health sector lead, EY Ireland; Samantha Humphreys, managing director, MSD Ireland human health, and Neil Pope, country manager Ireland, HN

of efficiency, saying: "When I look at a patient in, say, Cork University Hospital, they have to wait 722 days on average to get access to new medicines, whereas in Austria, they estimate 200 days, so there's a 500-day difference."

Before the coffee break, the next panel explored the link between women's health and the resilience of Ireland's health future. The panel featured Bernice Carter, assistant director of nursing at the Marie Keating Foundation, Kathy Maher, pharmacy owner and chair of the Pharmacy Contractors Committee at Irish Pharmacy Union, and Sinead Tuite, vaccines business lead at MSD Ireland.

Maher mentioned the experience of pharmacists who see women's health being left behind, and the importance of engaging with them at an early age on taking care of themselves.

As the caregiver role can be placed on them, it means they prioritise their own needs behind others. Tuite mentioned the importance of having good information available to women so they can make informed decisions around their health.

With the morning networking out of the way, it was time for the summit to split up into three streams.

Stream one focused on productivity and organisational change which Carville chaired. It began with a fireside chat with both Jo Shortt, assistant national director for health regions programme (organisational change unit) at the HSE, and Sarah Treleaven, principal officer at the Department of Health who gave an update on the HSE Health Regions implementation.

Next up was an international keynote on healthcare productivity with Charles Tallack, director of research and

analysis at The Health Foundation, UK, before leading onto a session on improving productivity using a behavioural science approach delivered by Dr Robert Murphy, senior economics research officer at the Department of Health.

Then there was a case study delivered by Rachael Ellis, Scan4Safety director at Hull University Teaching Hospital, who spoke about how its Scan4Safety programme increased efficiencies and enhanced patient safety through integrating GSI standards and barcode scanning in healthcare settings.

To finish up this stream, there was a panel discussion on defining productivity which included Caitriona Heffernan, HSE spark innovation lead, Dr Mary Coghlan, partner for AI & data at EY Ireland, Martina Quelly, regional executive officer for HSE Dublin and South East, and Siobhan Dunphy, assistant national director for strategic sourcing and contracting for procurement at the HSE.

Stream two looked at shifting the balance of care from hospitals to the community and featured Dr Paul Carroll, GP at Churchtown Medical, as its chair.

Kicking things off was the keynote talk on non-acute and community health and care services, which was delivered by

Sarah Reed, senior fellow in policy and research at the Nuffield Trust, UK.

Up next was professor Sara Burke, associate professor and director of the centre for health policy and management at TCD, who spoke about getting governance right in health regions.

After Prof Burke were two fireside chats. The first was on digitalising home and community care where Collette Gleeson, chief executive of Comfort Keepers Homecare Ireland, and Dermot Clancy, chief executive of One Touch Health, discussed how their digital platform is transforming the delivery of home and community care in Ireland and beyond.

The second focused on upskilling the workforce to deliver care in the community, where Fiona Melia HSCP assistant national lead at HSE, and professor Roman Romero-Ortuno, professor in medical gerontology at Trinity College Dublin and consultant physician at St James's Hospital, spoke about micro-credentials supporting upskilling in healthcare.

The final session was a panel discussion on how Ireland can become a healthier nation which brought together Doreen Enright, advocate for patient-centred care, Dr Diarmuid O'Donovan, director of national health improvement at the HSE, Dr Lynda Keaveney, chief clinical officer at Vhi Health and Wellbeing, and Janis Morrissey, director of health promotion, information and training at the Irish Heart Foundation.

The third and final stream was on how data can transform Irish healthcare, chaired by Sarah-Jane O'Dwyer, founder and chief executive at IntuVu Health.

This stream began with a panel discussion on the European Health Data Space and what it means for Ireland's healthcare, with Andy Bleaden, communities director at ECH Alliance, Clare Fitzell, head of strategic policy at the Irish Pharmacy Union, Elaine Murray, public affairs lead at EIT Health UK & Ireland, and Muiris O'Connor, assistant secretary at Department of Health.

Next was the international case study where Isabelle Francois, director of innovation at Medvia.be in Flanders, discussed Belgium's health maturity.

Following this was a talk on how digital innovations can improve patient outcomes delivered by professor Frank Sullivan, chief medical officer of Whyze Health and chief executive of Global Oncology Services.

Wrapping up this stream was a panel discussion on unlocking the full potential and value of healthcare data to improve data literacy, data quality and usage. This featured Maria McCann, head of practice data and digital solutions and organisational psychologist at Project Foundry, Neil O'Hare, group chief information officer at Children's Health Ireland, Orla Gogarty, director of digital health, transformation

and partnerships at St Patrick's mental health services, and Una Kearns, founder and chief executive of myPatientSpace.

With lunch out of the way, it was time for the afternoon sessions with all attendees returning to the main room. Carville welcomed everyone back but not before bringing McPhillips back to the stage to guide the audience through another two-minute exercise session, again to the Bee Gees' Stayin' Alive.

Once everyone was again warmed up, the focus was on where Ireland's healthcare service is in its digital ambitions. The first session was a fireside chat on using healthcare data to identify major risks for patients and turn them into preventative interventions.

This was a conversation with Damien McCallion, chief technology and transformation officer and deputy chief executive of the HSE, and Dr Chris Laing, chief executive of UCLPartners health innovation partnership, UK.

During the talk, McCallion noted the "great opportunity there is for predictive analytics in digital health to drastically reduce the costs we see," while Dr Laing added that "one of the challenges for analytics is how that is integrated into the system effectively and be responsive quickly... [as] the system is there to prevent people from going to the hospital [if they don't need it]."

Complementing this discussion was a panel on delivering a national Electronic Health Record which featured Ciara Moore, nova programme director at the EPUT & Mid & South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, Fran Thompson, chief information officer at the HSE, and Robert Watt, secretary general of the Department of Health.

Biggest challenges

When asked what the biggest challenges are, Moore mentioned clinical engagement and the importance of getting buy-in from those on the ground early, saying "make sure the clinicians are in the design, in the tender, and all over the business case. [For our project] they're now leading the programme with me and the team."

"This is not an IT project, and it's not just a two-year journey or 20 months either way a ten-year transformational journey, it takes a good 18 months to two years for people to get really familiar with the system... so don't expect it to happen in one day, these journeys take time."

The talk on digital wrapped up with a fireside chat with Bernard Gloster, chief executive of Health Service Executive. When asked about capital infrastructure, he said "with public money we go through a particular process and even when we decided to plan and build a major piece of infrastructure, even when that's approved, we have to go through a whole series of gateways. With timely implementation, we could be a lot better in what we do in infrastructure, but we'd be proud of some of the things we have achieved."

To finish up the summit, the final lock-note panel looked at healthcare resilience and responding to future threats, and saw Anne O'Connor, managing director at Vhi Health & Wellbeing DAC, Dr Ronan Glynn, partner and health sector lead at EY Ireland, and professor Mary Horgan, interim chief medical officer at the Department of Health, delving into the topic.

When asked what the biggest health threats are, O'Connor echoed earlier sentiments by stating earlier intervention as key, focusing on prevention rather than treatment as well as pushing forward in treating mental health.

"In reality we have a huge mental health challenge nationally, particularly post covid and we see the older population. It would be amiss not to mention things like loneliness and the impact that has on people's mental health in general. We know enough that we need people to stay well because otherwise we will not cope with that demand in terms of ageing."

Carville wrapped up the summit, thanking the audience for their questions. "It was really great to get so much engagement from you for the panels, it just transforms the health summit, and the pictures we get from discussing pertinent matters as well," she concluded.



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