

GP Biography

Name: *Dr David E Thomas*

Early Years:

Educated, Royal Belfast Academical Institution (Inst), and St Andrew's, College' Dublin.

Medical School, Trinity College Dublin 1960 -1966 Adelaide Hospital Dublin.

Training and Early Career in Medicine:

Following two years as houseman and SHO in the Adelaide and having decided to enter General Practice, as there was no formal GP training available at that time in Ireland, I was fortunate in obtaining a traineeship in Worcester. The Senior Partner was a Trinity man called Paddy Martin , who was officially my trainer , but in effect , I was taken under the wing of his junior partner, Dr Robin Steele.

He was involved at that time in running the GP trainee day release course in the University of Birmingham and subsequently became Vice Chairman of the RCGP.

My trainee year gave me a great insight into practice management, the importance of continuing medical education, and the significance of the psychological aspects of General Practice.

I realised I would benefit from returning to Hospital, to complete six months as house officer in OB/GYN in Worcester Royal Infirmary and six months psychiatry, in Powick, Hospital, Worcestershire.

I returned to Ireland in 1970 and following a three month locum in Sneem, County Kerry , as Dispensary doctor, I joined John Goodbody and Robin Benson in Blackrock, both of whom had strong Adelaide Hospital connections. as assistant with view in June 1970.

Personal:

Married (1972) to Kristin Thomas (nee Hannevig) two children, Wenda and Amy.

Kristin and I have shared outside interests, notably gardening antique restoration, inland waterways, foreign travel and visiting Greek sites. I enjoy competitive sailing, history, principally nineteenth -century Irish, and classic boat maintenance.

Career Highlights and any specific Special Interests:

Assistant 1970-1974 to Bunny Ellecker one night a week in the VD Clinic Sir Patrick Duns Hospital

Joined Fertility Guidance Company 1970, founded by Dr Dermot O'Brien-Hourihan and Dr Michael Solomons, the precursor of the Irish Family Planning Association.

Appointed part time assistant to College Health Service 1974 TCD, subsequently appointed first full time Director 1985-2006.

Part time Lecturer in General Practice TCD 1985-2010.

President and lecturer of Irish Travel Health Association

President of Irish Student Health Association

Medical Director and Board Member of Bloomfield Hospital 1990-2010

Any specific role in ICGP:

Foundation member of ICGP 1984 South Dublin Faculty.

*Joined Paul Lacey's Small Group (1984-2010) with John Mason, Bartley Sheehan
Stephen Murphy John Ryan*

Secretary of Dun Laoghaire Faculty 1990-1993

Chairman Dun Laoghaire Faculty 1994-1996

Council Member 1990-1996

Member of Organising Committee WONKA 1996-1998

ICGP representative HPSC Scientific Committee 2002-2007

ICGP representative: RCPI policy group on ageing 2016-2020

Co. Founder with Monica McWeeney: Retired GP Discussion Group 2013- Present.

Personal Reflections:

College Health Trinity College Dublin 1974-2005

While in practice with John Goodbody and Robin Benson in Blackrock in late 1974, I was approached by Peter Gatenby, Professor of Medicine in Trinity, to do a locum three afternoons a week, filling in for Jackie Wallace in the Student Health Service, Following his unfortunate death six weeks later I applied and was appointed to the post. This was to have a major impact on my subsequent career. The Student Health Service started in 1965 to provide free primary and psychiatric care for all undergraduate students ensuring no student went without medical care due to lack of finance.

In 1985 having shared some thoughts on the future of the College Health with Professor James McCormick, I was contacted by the Provost, Bill Watts. Dr Robin Nelson was retiring as part time Director, I was asked would I be prepared to assume the role.

I put forward a development plan, to expand the service, preserving the principal of a free health service, funded by the College to all undergraduate and postgraduate students, to generate an income from the GMS, Occupational health, Staff Consultations, Travel Health, a comprehensive Hepatitis B and TB screening program for Health Science Students, and Consultancy work. I was aware through my old boss Prof Nigel Kinnear funds could be available to fund a new purpose built Health Centre, from the Alek Buckley Foundation to the tune of £218,000 pounds.

Under Robin Nelson we were already a multidisciplinary service, in addition to 8 general practice sessions (Dr Mary Short having been appointed to do two sessions a week in the early eighties) we provided three psychiatric sessions a week (Dr Sinaed O'Brien, St Patrick's Hospital) a full time Student Counsellor , a Physiotherapist providing three sessions, a week a full time Nurse and full time secretary.

It was a big decision to drastically reduce my commitment to the practice in Blackrock, but one I never regretted. There was an agreement to provide annual St John's Accident First Aid Courses, to first year medical and dental students and key Trinity Staff. I remained a lecturer in Community Health/General Practice until my full retirement in 2010.

Trinity encouraged involvement in research into aspects of Student Health, to involvement in Department of Health subcommittees , Health Promotion, Sexual Health Services, National TB committee and the National Health Surveillance Committee (subsequently HBSC) They also supported my involvement with both the British and the Irish Student Health Associations, the ICGP and The Irish Travel Health Associations. This would have been problematic within a normal General practice.

The Health Service prospered, when I officially retired as Director of the Service having reached the age of 65 in 2006, we had expanded to 3 FTE GP's providing primary health care on Campus, Monday to Friday and 24 hour cover through our involvement with DUBDOC. Six physiotherapy sessions for Staff and Students throughout the year, a full time Health Promotion Officer, five Psychiatric sessions per week, on campus Sexual Health Clinics twice a week, in association with the GUIDE Clinic in St James's , Staff GP sessions daily, an Occupational Health Service for both Staff and Students, Travel Health Clinics for Staff and Students twice weekly and Smear and Chlamydia Screening.

Preparing for my retirement

Following my retirement Tom O'Dowd and Trinity seemed to have other plans. I spent a very happy five more years in Trinity ,gone but not gone away.

Providing three to four sessions a week in the Health Service and as a researcher in the Department of Public Health and Primary Care, where I contributed to a study on Primary care in the Irish Prison Service. This was a very gradual and painless way of retiring. Never a dull moment!

ON THE COUCH

What has been your experience of COVID-19?

Being in my seventy ninth year, like all our contemporaries Kristin and I have remained cocooned supported by our daughters, who leave our supplies on the doorstep.

Initially I felt frustrated that I was not in a position to volunteer, but this was placated by the suggestion from the CEO and Medical Director that retired GPs should be restricted, to those who were in active practice within the last three years.

Instead I constructed a list of retired friends, colleagues and old patients who I rang on a roughly weekly basis, to discuss how they were coping and commenting on the progress of the epidemic. Many of these conversations lasted for thirty to forty minutes.

I kept abreast of the clinical situation by attending a host of ICGP Zoom presentations and the virtual AGM, The leadership shown by people such as Fintan Foy, Tony Cox, Mary Favier, John Cox, Nuala O'Connor Andree Rochford and Ide delargy, and the executive staff of the College has been inspirational, and bodes well for the future of the College.

There are many positive aspects to the delivery of Primary care and Secondary Care which have come about, which must be preserved, the sense of collegiality within the profession, the advances in e prescribing, new lines of communication, the use of Zoom meetings, and cooperation between the profession, the IMO, the HSE and D of H & C.

What is the most significant medical advancement you have seen in your career?

In relation to General Practice the introduction of PPI's and H2 Antagonists in the treatment of GORD and Peptic Ulcers circa 1983

What major changes in general practice did you witness during your career?

Introduction of GMS Scheme 1974

Foundation of ICGP 1984, Blue book.

Commencement of Small Group Scheme 1984

1989 Renegotiation of GMS Scheme

Dublin WONCA 1998

Transformation of Communications

What did you love about practicing medicine?

In General Practice, never knew what challenge was coming through the door.

Contact with patients, in taking a history, examination and establishing a differential diagnosis.

Spot diagnosis and instant treatments such as Wax in the Ear.

Did you face any particular challenges as a GP?

Yes, frustrations with conservatism, the resistance to the concept of universal health care, contraception, and the right to choose.

Any particular advice for those GPs just starting their careers?

Always maintain a life work balance and exercise.

Develop at least one sub-speciality.

Treat all your patients with the respect you would wish your own family would receive.

What figures from the world of medicine/health do you most admire?

Four role models:

Dr Robin Steele MBE , my trainer in Worcester. Served three terms on the GMC, 1984-1999, 1992 appointed Vice President of the RCGP and Chairman of the preliminary Ethics Committee GMC.

Prof Peter Gatenby, Professor of Medicine TCD 1956-1974, for his remarkable bedside teaching and introducing me to the History of the Golden Age of Dublin Medicine. Responsible for my early involvement with Student Health. Later 1974-1984 appointed Principal Medical Director to the United Nations.

Prof James McCormick Professor of Primary Care TCD 1973-1992 Chair of the College Health Service Committee TCD, 1974-1988 for his support in developing the TCD Health Service and lateral thinking.

Prof Nigel Kinnear who following my House year in the Adelaide mentored and guided throughout my career, becoming lifelong friends and I was privileged to give his funeral oration in St Patrick's Cathedral.

What other career might you have chosen?

I was drawn to study history or physics but my father fortunately told me to study medicine or dentistry. there was no money in the others.

What three books would you bring to a desert island?

"Victorian Doctor," The biography of Sir William Wilde father of Oscar by TG Wilson.

"Riddle of the Sands", By Erskine Childers Snr.

"Turning the Tide," Autobiography of Dr Noel Browne.

If you did not live in Ireland, where else would you live?

Lake District Cumbria, magnificent mountains and lakes, Swallow and Amazon books, close to Stranraer ferry.

What are you most proud of?

To have been awarded an Honorary Doctorate (MD Hon Causa) Trinity College Dublin 2006.

Annual Award of the Irish Student Health Association was named, "The Dr David Thomas Annual Award, "presented to the person who has contributed most significantly to the furtherance of Student Health in Ireland.

Summarise yourself in 12 words.

Value my Protestant Ethos, hard work, thrift, efficiency, individuals right to choose.