



President's Engagements – Report to Council
3rd of November 2018

I am now in post for five months and it has been very challenging and busy: I want to thank you all so much. The specific role of the president is not actually described anywhere but I have taken it to be Michael D with John Gillman a wiser and warmer Leo Varadkar.

Three years ago, at the ICGP Annual Conference 2016, Professor Frede Olesen from Denmark posed the question – how do you balance the portrayal of general practice as the wonderful job it is whilst at the same time highlighting the very serious problems to a wider political community? I have tried to do this by highlighting the three issues of capacity, resources and workload when addressing those outside stakeholders but have concentrated on what is special and exceptional about the enterprise, when addressing our own. It is a balancing act and I am sure I do not always get it right. Apart from the board work and the ongoing discussions that flow from that I have represented college at a number of engagements and have usually had the opportunity to say a few words. For the record, the following is a chronicle of my activity:

- Wicklow Faculty Dinner - 22nd of June
- National Trainer's Conference - 21st of June
- Meeting with Department of Health in relation to the 8th amendment – 25th of June and 11th of July
- Trainee Induction Day – 6th of July
- Meeting with Saudi Family Medicine Academies – 9th of July
- Meeting Personal Injuries Assessment Board – 21st of August
- RCSI Trainers Group – 4th of September
- Conferring of MSK Diplomas RCSI – 15th of September
- Oireachtas presentation 8th Amendment – 19th of September
- Launch of Saudi Family Medicine programme – 30th of September
- ICGP Network of GP Trainees Conference – 11th of October
- Irish Healthcare Awards BeaGP Award – 17th of October
- Medisec Conference – 13th of October
- St Luke's Dinner RCPI - 20th of October
- Regional meetings:
 - Sligo – 10th of October

- Limerick – 23rd of October
- Cork – 24th of October
- Methadone Treatment Protocol 20 years – 25th of October
- Various radio and TV contributions
- ICGP Podcast
- ICGP eZine

The red hot button issue this year has been the passing of the Repeal of the 8th amendment and the drive by the minister to deliver a service for January 2019. Initial meetings with the Department of Health clarified the three streams of work – the legislation, the design of service and guidelines. The college undertook to deliver the guidelines for general practice. From correspondence with members it became clear there were three groups within college – those who wished to provide this service in their own practices, those who had a conscientious objection to such provision and those who would not provide the service for other reasons such as capacity issues.

The guidelines are nearly complete and whilst the design of the service is not a task for College, it has felt compelled to act to avoid a design unfit for purpose, the consequence of which would inevitably fall back on general practice. The college will have red line requirements which may include a 24-hour helpline medically staffed to provide medical advice and counselling and to direct patients to service, properly resourced and effective clinical care pathways and finally an opt in mechanism for any GP involvement.

The college has been contacting and canvassing members views right from the start but it has been a very emotive and divisive issue. Despite individual communications, an online canvassing of opinions and regional meetings there remains very considerable anger directed towards the ICGP. In particular, I think it is fair to say, those with a conscientious objection believe that the actions of college are unfairly weighted against them. Regardless of whether this is a true representation of what has happened, and I believe it is not, these views will be heard. These matters were discussed at some length at our last meeting and as an EGM has been called for December 2nd perhaps we could defer discussion until then.

There is a very considerable risk this issue will damage college most grievously with a split and a significant loss of members. It is worth recalling what general practice was like in Ireland before college came into existence: it was an educational wasteland, a very difficult environment in which to deliver quality care and a divisive and isolating place in which to work. The ICGP has been the agent of a relentless incremental improvement in the quality of general practice and the means of developing a group identity around which GPs can gather and have some pride in.

Many members have no awareness of this and how diminished they would be without College: they are angry at a wide variety of other problems with finance, capacity and

workload being chief amongst them. The trade union representation has been disempowered and split as a result of governmental actions and, without recourse to collective action, this has resulted in a simmering rage which is conflated into this issue. These are very precarious times and I am calling on you and indeed on all members who think College is worth something to defend it vigorously against those who would undermine it.

I have heard people using pejorative words about those with whom they do not agree, impugn their motives and question their honesty and integrity. These are divisive thoughts deeds and attitudes and it is worth bearing in mind that collegiality and keeping a unified profession starts within yourself. To open your heart and to hold the other in respect and relationship, to seek to see the world through their eyes and to repeatedly offer the hand of friendship is probably the only way to bridge differences that are deep and passionate. As practicing GPs, you all know this and it is the basis for the relationship medicine you practice: why should it be any different in your dealings with colleagues. Holding onto hurt and insult is often what people do to their own detriment and that of relationship but this is no time for self-indulgence and the act of generosity of forgiveness and openness is all you have to hold the centre as a collegiate. I urge you all not to bridle at the meanness of others but rather to parse your own thought and language for the same. Kindness, courage, empathy, loyalty, and honesty are all the values general practitioners espouse for their patients: it would be good if we held to them in our dealings with each other also.

Dr John O'Brien,
President.