

Report on the Global Health Education Ireland Symposium, October 2020.

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The Global Health Education Ireland Symposium 2020 was held virtually on 23rd October to resounding success. This RCSI facilitated HSE symposium provided a unique and exciting opportunity for staff to engage with and learn about current developments in global health from the world's eminent experts. In the current climate of a worldwide pandemic, international efforts to combat COVID-19 bring the global nature of health into sharp focus – we face this global threat together. United we stand, divided we fall. The theme of this year's symposium was 'Learning from COVID-19 and improving health for all' with an additional focus on education in global health.

Mr Colm Brophy TD, Minister of State for Overseas Development and Diaspora, provided insightful opening remarks to the first session of the day. He thanked healthcare staff and reported being "struck by the professionalism, dedication, hard work and resilience of our health workers as we learn to navigate a pandemic". He outlined how Ireland must invest in better global health outcomes and described the ongoing commitment of the Irish government to achieving "gender equality, reducing humanitarian need, addressing climate action, and improving governance". Minister Brophy also announced a new partnership between Irish Aid and the HSE to support the mental health of healthcare workers in Ethiopia and Jordan.

Other highlights from the first session of the symposium included a presentation from Dr Colm Henry, Chief Clinical Officer of the HSE. Dr Henry stated that COVID-19 has starkly "reminded us of the globalisation of health and forces us to recognise the transnational nature of health issues, determinants and solutions". He outlined the ways in which we in Ireland can learn from the African response to COVID-19, as Africa has extensive experience in controlling serious infectious diseases such as Ebola and HIV. He stressed the importance of taking a whole government approach to combating COVID-19, strong surveillance and response systems, effective engagement with local communities and making efficient use of resources. "Ní neart go cur le chéile" - there is no strength like co-operation.

Dr Mike Ryan, Executive Director of the Health Emergencies Programme, WHO was another highly anticipated speaker at this symposium. He did not disappoint. Dr Ryan spoke about the future of global health training. He explained how the world has changed in relation to education in health and how COVID-19 has revealed "existing fragilities, inequities, lack of flexibility and lack of scalability" within health systems. He outlined some of the current challenges that we face as healthcare staff, such as the shortfall of at least 18 million health workers worldwide and the need for health systems that are prepared and can scale up rapidly in response to emerging health threats. He referenced both the "gender divide", acknowledging that women provide much of the frontline healthcare in many countries where they are the "least paid and least recognised" and have limited autonomy with respect to decision making; and the "digital divide", where only approximately half of the world has access to the internet. These situations must change. Dr Ryan described the WHO's global training response to COVID-19 and their experience making real time training available to healthcare staff worldwide in many languages. He spoke of the challenges that we must overcome for the future of learning in health. He advised that we must all learn to care for our own mental health in the face of the increased work stresses encountered at this time and

emphasised the importance that all health workers have access to the “support services that they need” at this time. In Dr Ryan’s words - “the need to learn is a constant lifelong process”, and we need to respond to “learner needs” and respect the time constraints of frontline workers who are often “very busy and haven’t seen their family in a week”. Dr Ryan also advocated a move towards more “competency based learning” rather than “academic qualifications that can be certified” to strengthen overall health knowledge ecosystems.

Dr David Weakliam, Director of the HSE Global Health Programme and Chair of the Global Health Strategic Working Group on the Forum of Postgraduate Medical Training Bodies spoke about the crucial importance of providing education in global health for healthcare workers worldwide. He outlined the applicability of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in this education process and described the importance of addressing inequalities so that we “leave no one behind” in our efforts to achieve universal health coverage and strive to “reach the furthest behind first”. He referenced the WHO ‘Global strategy on human resources for health, workforce 2030’ document and the need to “build long-term sustainable resilient health systems”. Dr Weakliam referenced the ways in which digital technology has revolutionised education and training in health and the importance of working together through our global partnerships to develop this training resource.

The second session of the symposium was comprised of fascinating presentations given by a range of representatives from a number of medical training bodies and health partnerships working with low and middle income countries to educate and train health workers and improve quality of care. The esteemed line up of speakers included: Dr Doreen Mashava, Registrar, College of Anaesthesiologists of East, Central and Southern Africa; Ms Stella Itungu, Chief Operating Officer, College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa; Dr Joe Gallagher, General Practitioner, Gorey Malawi Health Partnership; Dr Desalegn Bekele, Coordinator, Health Service Quality Improvement Team, Ministry of Health, Ethiopia; and Dr Jonathan Sitali, Registrar, Zambia College of Medicine and Surgery.

The final session in the symposium described global health education in Ireland and the next steps in this training journey. Professor Diarmuid O’Donovan, Professor in Global Health, Queen’s University Belfast outlined the growing body of published literature with respect to global health education of healthcare staff and current competency models for global health education. He emphasised the importance of reciprocity in global health partnerships, planetary health and universal health coverage. Dr Niamh McCarthy, Co-chair of the Subgroup on Incorporating Global Health into Postgraduate Medical Training Programmes, informed us about current efforts to develop a global health curriculum for postgraduate medical training in Ireland. Professor Frank Murray, Director of the National Doctors Training Programme, presented on the International Medical Graduates Training Initiative (IMGTI) Scholarship Programme which facilitates doctors from Sudan and Pakistan in coming to Ireland to train for two years prior to returning home. This initiative is mutually beneficial for both countries and both health systems involved and is adherent to the WHO global code of practice. Professor Mark Shrimme, O’Brien Chair of Global Surgery, RCSI outlined the differences in competencies needed for education in surgery versus education in global surgery. He described how global surgeons need to be well informed in areas such as implementation science, economics, ethics, human behaviour, history, policy modelling and advocacy in order to function as effective global surgeons. Finally, Dr Sandra Green, Co-founder of Irish Doctors for the Environment reminded us of our responsibilities to the environment as healthcare professionals and the battle that we must all continue to wage in order to prevent further species extinctions, reduce global energy consumption and halt the worrying rise in global temperatures.

If you missed the symposium and wish to view any of these wonderful presentations yourself, they are available on the [RCSI’s YouTube channel](#).