

# The changing canvas of Irish general practice

Fionán Ó'Cuinneagáin

**Others in this publication reflect on the “glories”**

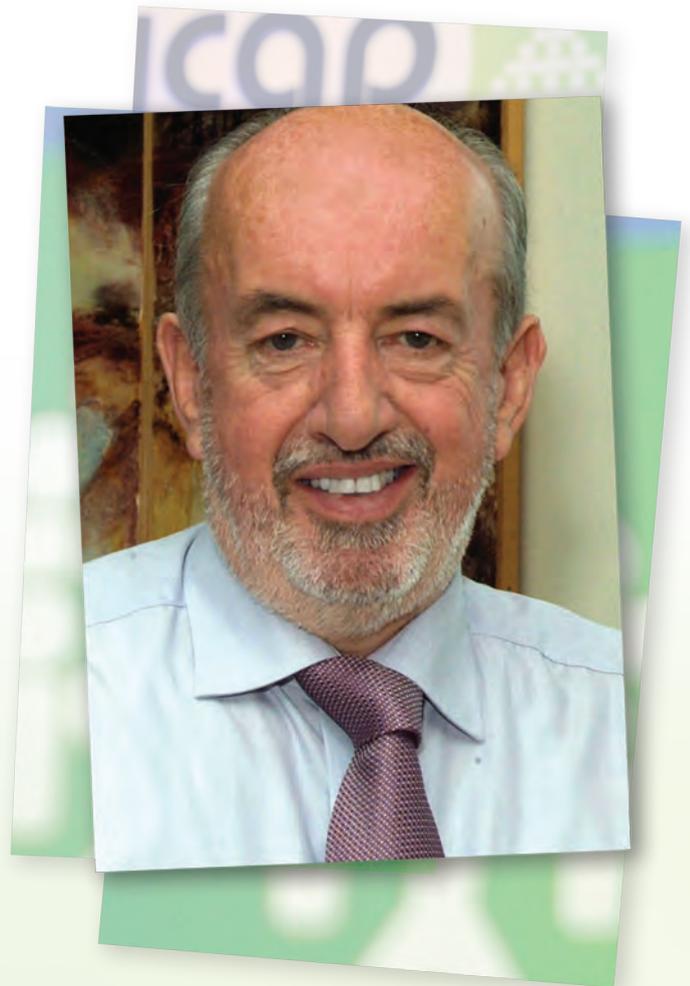
of the past 25 years. There is no doubt that enormous development has been achieved across the entire range of general practice, education, training, standards and practice management. These advances have been achieved by considerable commitment by members and college staff.

Across the spectrum of college activity over the years approximately 40% of members have given of their time in providing the leadership necessary at all levels local, national and international. I am loath to name any individual or group but feel I must highlight the enormous time commitment and leadership provided by those members who sat on the college executive over the past 25 years. There is much to be proud of.

Many of our recent graduands may of course take it for granted that the ICGP was always there providing the wide range of current supports and services. However, in 1984 there was no GP organisation in Ireland; at that time there were five GP training programmes (Galway, Cork, Dublin, Donegal, Sligo) and two CME Groups (West Cork and Waterford).

There are now 13 GP training programmes, 37 CME tutors – 150 small groups, five university departments of general practice, an internationally-recognised membership examination, a wide range of CPD courses and programmes and an extensive management in practice service. These are in addition to the extensive range of other supports and services provided through the ICGP. I should also acknowledge the support of the RCGP in the lead-up to the foundation and the many RCGP members who joined the ICGP in support.

The development of the college was incremental, and two key developments which provided the foundation to where we are now were the publication of 'The future organisation of general practice' (Blue Book) in 1988 and the establishment



*Fionán Ó'Cuinneagáin, chief executive –  
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of the Research and Education Foundation in 1990. All that has developed since were predicated on these two initiatives.

At the commencement there were two people on the payroll. There are now 16 with a further 22 on a 'protected time' basis. In addition there are 37 CME tutors, 65 GP training directors, over 300 GP trainers and of course an increasing number of appointments in the university departments.

A further pointer reflective of the development of the college is the membership. At the end of the first year (March 1985) there were 1,200 members. There are now 2,500 members and 600 associate GP trainees.

Of course I must mention the WONCA world conference, which we hosted in Dublin in 1998. This was the largest WONCA conference, up to that point, attracting over 4,000 delegates and 1,500 partners from 82 countries – a massive achievement bearing in mind that Dublin did not have a convention centre.

However, we should not reflect too much on the past and must now focus on the next quarter century. This 25th anniversary coincides with a wide range of fundamental changes taking place across the structure of our health services and the delivery of patient care.

With the establishment of the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Health Information and Quality Authority, the Medical Council under the Medical Act 2007 and the Forum for Postgraduate Medical Bodies, it is critical that the ICGP and the family of general practice are directly involved in all of the new initiatives underway which have a direct impact on services, education, training and standards.

Much of the initial interaction is being undertaken by a small number of college executive and staff. However, considerably more resources and member participation will be required in order to meet the challenges ahead and ensure that the contribution and needs of general practice are addressed and acknowledged across the full range of changes.

A key development is the appointment by the HSE of the National Director of Clinical Care and the appointment of clinical directors appointed in the hospital sector.

These appointments will be addressing integrated models of care, across primary and secondary care, including the allocation of resources in that context.

The ICGP will be required to contribute directly to all of these developments from the GP perspective. This will require members in leadership positions, including tutors, trainers and others, to take on responsibilities in these developments.

There will of course be resource implications which will be difficult to attain in the current economic environment and much will depend on our response in the context of the status and pride in the specialty of general practice, reflective of the status of the specialty achieved over the past 25 years.

Over the years, many papers have been delivered on 'Irish general practice. The Foundation Lectures delivered by the late Conal O'Doherty in 1989, 'Whither general practice – incline or decline' and by Eileen Caulfield in 1990, 'Irish general practice – crossroads or cul-de-sac', although delivered 20 years ago, are worth reflecting on – even with this much changed canvas.

C'est la-vie!

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