

Inter-disciplinary approach is the way to make progress

Mary Harney



Mary Harney – GP training schemes will not be sufficient to meet the demands of a growing population

I wish to compliment the Irish College of General Practitioners on the role it has played since its establishment in 1984, in developing general practice and promoting standards within the profession.

GP services are a key and integral component of a modern primary care service. Modern service delivery through the primary care system will see greater emphasis being placed on prevention, service

integration, team working, information-sharing, extended care and training health professionals to work together. For GPs, as well as for other health professionals, this will necessitate change in the way they deliver their service.

The Primary Care Strategy aims to shift the emphasis from the current over-reliance on acute hospitals and specialist services to a service where people will have access to a range of health professionals working in multidisciplinary teams, meeting the vast majority of people's needs in their local community. The Government is committed to developing and reorganising our primary care services in line with this model. I am very encouraged that GPs have responded so positively to the HSE as it has been developing its plans for primary care teams.

The enactment and progressive implementation of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 is a significant step in the Government's drive to better ensure standards of patient safety. One of the most significant features of the legislation is the introduction of a scheme for the maintenance of professional competence by doctors. GPs have been to the fore in contributing to this development through their

participation in the Medical Council's pilot of certain aspects of a new scheme. The Council is now actively working to finalise preparations for the new scheme, so that the relevant enabling provisions of the Medical Practitioners Act can be commenced.

Research suggests that the current gender distribution in general practice will be reversed into the future with a predicted ratio of 65 females to 35 males and that by 2020 almost 30% of female and 5% of male GPs can be expected to work part-time. There are 12 GP specialist training programmes currently in operation in the state with a total of 120 new places available each year. It is widely recognised that this figure will not be sufficient to meet the demands of a growing and ageing population.

I welcome the ongoing discussions between the College and the HSE with a view to increasing the number of GP trainees by streamlining existing programmes in a cost effective manner. In addition, the College has identified a number of doctors who have not had formal training in general practice but who are interested in pursuing a career as a GP. The provision of a programme of training for these doctors is also being examined.

There are many GPs who wish to provide services under the GMS scheme and are having difficulty in gaining entry to the scheme. It has been my intention for some time that any restrictive rules preventing fully qualified GPs taking on patients under the GMS scheme should be ended.

The changes which we must bring about in the delivery of our health services will require commitment, flexibility and mutual respect. There will be challenges along the way but I am confident that with interdisciplinary working we will achieve better communication and support between professionals, thus maximising professional capacity and thereby ensuring a more integrated and responsive service for patients.