

# Remembering the roller coaster as ICGP chairman

Garrett Hayes

**To try to fill Michael Boland boots**, he being the most progressive, innovative and iconic chairman of the ICGP ever, and those of Declan Murphy, who masterminded the organisation structure of the ICGP and is one of the most meticulous and organised people I have met, was a major task for me before I even knew it.

My introduction to the executive of the ICGP was not via the traditional route of a long history in medical education and training but was in a manner of speaking from the backbenches or the coalface.

I was not a Foundation member of the ICGP but was carried along by the flood of enthusiasm after the ICGP was launched in 1984. I was quietly minding my own business at the AGM held in the former Great Southern Hotel in Galway when Declan Murphy approached me and in a quiet corner and asked me to allow myself to be proposed as college secretary at the Council meeting next day.

I was completely surprised, flattered and delighted and next day was elected on to the executive. Then under Declan's excellent chairmanship for the next nine months, I motored along, enjoying the involvement immensely. That was until the bombshell landed.

Early in 1989, Declan announced at an executive meeting that due to tragic personal circumstances he was going to stand down as chairman at the Cork AGM in May. The search began among the executive for a replacement and I was definitely not a first choice candidate.

College heavyweights on the executive, the late Michael Dunne from Cork, Michael Coughlan from Galway and Ger Kidney from Tullamore were, for a variety of reasons unable to take the position. It finally came round to me and after lot of discussion, it was agreed that I would be proposed as chairman at the AGM.

This was a far from unanimous decision and I knew that many of those involved did not agree. But there was little

choice, if you can believe that! At the time, the college was dynamic, vibrant and there was huge competition for positions of power. It was agreed that it would be kept secret until the actual meeting to avoid any possible coup.

The AGM in 1989 was in the old Jury's in Cork and on the Saturday evening I had taken our children for a swim in the pool. As we were dressing, I was talking to Michael Harty from Kilmihil who had done likewise. At this stage, there was a rumour about Declan's departure and Michael asked me who might be the new chairman. I don't really know, I remember lying to him!

Next day, after all had gone to plan and I was elected chairman, one of the first to offer me congratulations was Michael, who, in fairly colourful language, reminded me of what I had said the previous evening and suggested that I must have known (or words to that effect).

The roller coaster started there and went on for three years. What an experience. What an honour and what adrenaline the job generated! My wife Siobhan and I (and sometimes the children) travelled all over the country from Donegal to Wexford and Cavan to Cork to faculty meetings. At the time there was a huge interest in functions and I had the opportunity to meet fellow GPs from every part of Ireland. Even today, some 20 years later, I meet colleagues again and I am so pleased to have had that opportunity.

The college was trying to establish itself and to have general practice taken seriously and so there was a huge sense of collegiality. At times there were political issues such as when I said that the then Minister for Health, Rory O'Hanlon's decision to change to Drugs Payment Scheme threshold from £30 per month to £90 per quarter was a major change in the scheme and that it would impact on those who could least afford it. The department refused to speak to the college for three months after that!

I also had a "major row" with Norman Murphy, in Cork, who



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## *Local GPs got together and supported one another*

was heavily involved in the IMO, except that Norman and I had not even met, not to mind having a "major row". We both laughed about it afterwards when we did meet and we are still friends.

I could not have survived and managed the three years without the huge support from my wife Siobhan and my children, Nicola, Richard and Rhian who not only had to put up with my ICGP role but also the trauma of my leaving a practice and starting a practice in my home, right in the middle of my three years. I was always supported by excellent presidents; the late Conal O'Doherty, Paddy Henry, Dick Shanahan and the late Ted O'Brien.

But nothing would have ever succeeded without Fionán. He

was the real chairman, president and leader of the orchestra. His support to me and to every officer since has been phenomenal and I certainly could not have had any success without his support and guidance.

Yes, I did enjoy it and I hope that others got as much from the college as I did. It certainly gave me a new confidence about general practice and it also opened doors that may now seem incredible, where local GPs got together and supported one another, rather than competing.

And the worst part? The incredible sensation of not being involved, not been consulted, not being asked for your opinion, the weeks after leaving office. There is nothing as ex as an ex chairman!