



Ministerial Message for Ceremony of the Graduate Diploma in Health Care

From Mr Simon Harris T.D, Minister for Health

I was delighted to have been asked to attend this Graduation Ceremony this evening, and wish to extend my heartfelt apologies to you all that I have been unable to attend in person due to pressing Government business.

I know you are in the fortunate position however where a number of distinguished speakers will address you this evening. I am sure that you are all looking forward to hearing the words of Senator Michael McDowell, Dr Ciaran Breen, the Director of the States Claims Agency, Professor Cecily Kelleher and Professor Pat Murray.

There are a number of others among the audience whom I was looking forward to meet, such as Dr Kevin Stewart, the External Examiner for the course, Mr. David Walsh, the CEO of Challenge Indemnity, representatives of the UCD School of Medicine, and of course, most importantly, you, the graduates, and your families and friends who have joined you here tonight.

As Minister for Health, I am greatly encouraged to see so many graduates from a course such as this. I commend the dedication and commitment which all of you have demonstrated towards improving the approach which the health service takes to risk management and quality improvement.

This is of course particularly the case in a situation such as this, where you all choose to take on this additional study while continuing to perform in your current roles. I am sure that the drive and determination it took to arrive here today will be highly beneficial as you now move to bring what you have learned to bear on the health service. You are all to be congratulated.

When I was appointed as Minister for Health in 2016, I spoke of my hopes for building a health service that would make us proud. I can assure you that my resolve to achieve this is as strong as ever. Today, we have a unique opportunity to put in place a long term vision for our health services. A vision that when translated into outcomes, will make a real difference to people's lives.

I know that we share the same goal - to create a health service where the patient comes first.

As Minister for Health, I was pleased to be able to launch the National Patient Safety Office in December 2016. This new entity is an integral part of the Department of Health; it will drive new developments in patient safety policy and legislation; establish a patient safety surveillance system, and promote the clinical effectiveness agenda.

Through the work of this office we are already seeing a number of new patient safety initiatives that are starting to bear fruit, for example with the publication of monthly Maternity Patient Safety Statements since December 2015 by all maternity hospitals and units now being followed by similar monthly reports from all hospitals. In addition, Ireland's first ever National Patient Experience Survey was undertaken earlier this year, in a joint initiative of the Department of Health, the HSE and HIQA. This will, for the first time, enable us to capture the actual experience of patients in our acute hospitals. All adults who were discharged from an acute hospital in the month of May were invited to participate in the survey. The reports from this survey are due to be published towards the end of this year.



The National Patient Safety Office is also bringing forward an ambitious programme of legislation. In November 2015 the Government gave its approval to the drafting of provisions to support open disclosure of patient safety incidents. These provisions have now been included in the Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill which is currently making its way through the Oireachtas. The Bill is part of a broader package of reforms aimed at improving the experience of those who are affected by adverse events.

In addition, to provide for the regulation of all hospitals, a Patient Safety Licensing Bill is currently being developed, while legislation in relation to the mandatory reporting of serious incidents is also being progressed.

I have also recently approved National Standards for the Conduct of Reviews of Patient Safety Incidents, which have been developed by the Health Information and Regulatory Authority and the Mental Health Commission. These Standards were commissioned by the Department of Health and are underpinned by recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer. They are designed to overcome a number of identified problems, including:

- confusion regarding incident classification and the method of review required
- inconsistency in the time taken to conduct and complete reviews
- variable quality of reviews
- individual anonymised procedures

These new Standards aim to promote a framework for best practice in the conduct of reviews of patient safety incidents and to set a standard for cohesive, person-centred reviews of such incidents. The development of these Standards will provide the basis for continuing the process of improving patient safety and quality across the health service. The Standards have also been designed to complement the HSE Open Disclosure Policy, which has been in operation since November 2013.

As you are all no doubt aware, we are now in a time when healthcare associated infections and antimicrobial resistance represent significant challenges to patient safety, both in Ireland and internationally as well.

In recent years Ireland has achieved a significant reduction in reported MRSA infection rates, but antimicrobial resistance continues to evolve and constant work is needed to respond to it. The more recent rise in resistant strains of bacteria mean that we must consider all effective methods in our approach to addressing this problem - including education and training, surveillance and of course a more prudent use of antibiotics.

In responding to the challenges of antimicrobial resistance, the Government is in agreement that a cross-sectoral approach is vital. A 'One Health' approach, which encompasses all areas - human health, animal health, agriculture and the environment – is the only way that we will be able to tackle this issue effectively.



The World Health Organisation's 2015 Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance calls on countries to develop their own 'One Health' national action plans on antimicrobial resistance, in line with its Global Plan.

On foot of this, an Interdepartmental AMR Consultative Committee, jointly chaired by the Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health and the Chief Veterinary Officer of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, has overseen and guided the development of Ireland's first National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance. This plan was approved by the Government in June and it is planned to formally launch it in the very near future.

The Department of Health has also recently published the third National Healthcare Quality Reporting System annual report. It focuses on a range of outcomes that are important to patients and that reflect the broad range of health services provided in Ireland. The report identifies areas where Irish health services are performing well, and where further room for improvement exists. For example, last year's report showed considerable variation across the country in rates of hospitalisation for common chronic diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, diabetes and heart failure. Identifying this variation is a first step to addressing the reasons why this variation exists and to improving it.

These are just some of the areas where your work and the work of the Department of Health intersect.

Finally, I would once again like to congratulate you all on your success and wish you the very best of luck in the next chapter of your careers. I look forward to working with all of you in enhancing and improving the safety and quality of the healthcare system for our service users and our staff.