

## Annual Report 2012 Launch

### Speaking notes for President Kieran Murphy

#### Welcome

- I'm pleased to welcome you here for the launch of the Council's 2012 annual report and the Medical Council Term Report outlining key points from our term of office over the past five years.
- With the implementation of all parts of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, regulation of the medical profession has changed immensely over the past five years. The Act has greatly enhanced our ability to ensure the continuing safety of patients and has facilitated a greater openness and transparency in our processes than ever before.

Our term has seen a number of firsts:

- In 2008, Council became the first in the world to be comprised of a majority of non-medical members. The concerns raised in advance were not realised and I believe that the Council was significantly strengthened by this development. The role of the Medical Council is to protect the public by ensuring the highest professional standards by doctors. I believe that it is right that the public interest should form the majority on health regulatory bodies, including the Medical Council.
- For many, the big change during this Medical Council has been the introduction of public fitness to practise inquiries and the attendant media coverage. The first of these was held in 2009 and this change has undoubtedly increased transparency in the handling of complaints. It has also ensured that the Council is held to account to a greater degree as our response to complaints is subject to increased scrutiny. The Medical Council fully understands the challenges that these new processes pose for both doctors and patients and has worked hard to support both doctors and patients in these procedures.
- In 2011 for the first time, it became a legal obligation for doctors to keep their knowledge and skills up to date with the introduction of professional competence requirements. This is a tremendously

important part of the changes for the Irish medical profession and a key to future patient safety. This system is still at an early stage, but its development in the coming years will allow for a targeted approach to addressing areas of risk among the profession. I would particularly like to congratulate the medical profession for their support and commitment to these new procedures.

- New standards for the education and training of doctors in Ireland have been established which benchmark favourably against the highest standards internationally. Doctors trained in Ireland are highly regarded internationally and the public should be confident that doctors trained here are among the best in the world. Over the course of Council's term, 28 visits to medical schools were conducted in addition to inspecting 48 intern training sites to ensure that Council standards are being implemented.
- We know that doctors who display unprofessional behaviour at medical school are more likely to continue to demonstrate such behaviour throughout their careers. It has therefore been an area of focus for the Council to ensure that the standards we set at undergraduate level are laying the foundations for lifelong good and safe practice.
- Collaboration has been a focus for this Council and consultation has been key to the development of Council policies and procedures. We have sought to engage in meaningful communication with patients, doctors and all of our partner organisations. We are fully aware that, to make a meaningful contribution, we need to work with partners across the health and regulatory systems to ensure a concerted approach to improving patient safety.

As many of you are aware, the Council is concluding its term tomorrow, so today is the last event I'll be presiding over as President. Firstly, I would like to thank all members of the outgoing Medical Council for their dedication and commitment over the past five years. It is only as a member of the Council that you can truly appreciate the huge volume of work that is involved. I would like to pay a particular tribute to Dr Anna

Clarke for her outstanding role as Vice-President and to the Council Committee Chairs. I would also like to acknowledge the sheer professionalism of the Medical Council Executive and in particular the CEO Caroline Spillane. It has been a real privilege for me to work with her and all the members of her team. The staff are the unsung heroes of the organisation and are totally committed to the work of the Council. I would like to thank all members of the Medical Council Committees and Working Groups, many of whom are here today, for your invaluable contribution to the work of the Council. Finally, I would like to thank all our wider stakeholders and partner organisations, many of whom are also here today. The Council's effectiveness is contingent on working with others within the health system to ensure we work cohesively and collaboratively to do what is best for patients.

Over the next number of years, there are several challenges ahead for the next Medical Council which takes up office next month. Firstly, the next Council may seek to engage more fully with doctors to ensure greater understanding and collaboration across the broad range of Council activities. Secondly, although we've worked hard to improve standards in education and training, we have also seen many non-consultant hospital doctors, trained to a very high level at significant cost to the taxpayer, leaving the Irish healthcare system on completion of their training. We need to ensure that these doctors remain valued within our healthcare system and I believe that their retention needs to be prioritised. Finally, the next Council will need to ensure that the public interest continues to remain at the forefront of all decision making. Guided by the public interest and working with doctors and other stakeholders, it will consolidate a health system which prioritises patient safety above all other concerns.

It has been a real privilege for me to serve as President over the past five years and I wish the incoming Council every success for their term of office.