

Health Matters

A monthly overview of news and developments within the health sector in Northern Ireland.

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Belfast Local
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**"The
e-zine is
excellent!"**

Gillian Creevy,
Northern
Ireland Cancer
Fund for
Children

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Welcome

to the second edition of Health Matters.

We were delighted to receive great feedback following our first edition and are keen to build on this with more up to date news and developments within the health sector in Northern Ireland.

We welcome future contributions from our readers so if you feel you have something of interest, please get in touch. We are also keen to expand our readership further, so if you know of anyone that would like to subscribe for free please do spread the word about Health Matters and encourage them to sign up via the Asitis website.

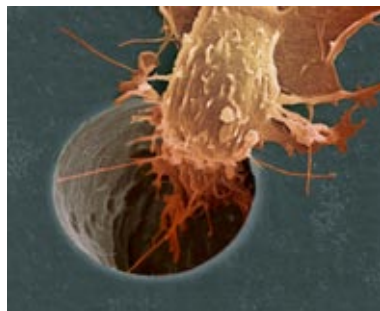
In this edition we have included a feature

on George O'Neill the Chairman of Belfast Local Commissioning Group. He provides us with an insightful look into his career within the Health Service and the challenges it faces over the coming months.

We have also provided an overview of health issues that have hit the headlines during March and some of the key developments up at Stormont. In our diary focus we have provided information on some of our own health focused events including information on an upcoming masterclass on how to influence government using social media.

News Review

Scientists from Belfast have been at the forefront of medical research this month.



A doctor involved in a trial looking at the effectiveness of a drug for Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML) has said early findings are positive. Medical research into the disease has already achieved great success and

revealed the survival rate has risen dramatically as a result of studying the genetic make-up of the tumours.

Whilst, scientists from the Experimental Cancer Medicine Centre (ECMC) in Belfast are developing a revolutionary way to administer radiation to prostate cancer patients, so that only the tumour and not surrounding cells are targeted.

In other research news, it has been claimed that junk food may be addictive in the same way as heroin or cocaine. This was according to a study showing that



laboratory rats will endure painful electric shocks to satisfy their craving for high-calorie snacks made from sausages, bacon and cheesecake. The findings lend support to the idea that certain types of energy-intensive foods can trigger compulsive overeating and obesity in humans, leading to a form of food addiction that is almost impossible to overcome by dieting.

News Review (continued)

The debate concerning breast cancer screening continued this month, when it was revealed that the lives of two women are saved for every one who receives potentially unnecessary treatment. This statistic was revealed in research published in the *Journal of Medical Screening*. Experts are currently unable to distinguish between these less harmful cancers and some more aggressive types, meaning they are all routinely treated.



It has been announced by the Health Minister Michael McGimpsey that healthy children will no longer be vaccinated for swine flu, as the number of detections for the virus and GP consultations continue to fall.

Health workers or those who develop an underlying illness or become pregnant can still be vaccinated.

The Minister faced criticism this month when it was revealed that there has been a huge increase in the number of people who have waited longer than they should have, for a first outpatient appointment in hospitals here. Michael McGimpsey's previous claim that work on reducing waiting lists was stopped while he waited to find out how much money he would have to battle swine flu was rubbished by Finance Minister Sammy Wilson.

The Health Service again came under scrutiny when it was revealed this month that more than two million has been spent by the health service on interpreters over the past two years. A significant increase in migrant workers in towns such as Dungannon, Craigavon and Newry has led to soaring costs in the southern region.

Thousands of people with Multiple Sclerosis say their quality of life is suffering due to a lack of neuro-physiotherapists. A recent survey by the MS society NI revealed that only thirteen per cent of patients in Northern Ireland were receiving adequate treatment. A campaign is currently being carried out across the country to raise awareness for the lack of services for people with the condition.

A shortage of junior doctors has also been stressed by the British Medical Association who has stated that this may result in patients waiting longer and travelling further for treatments.

The Minister for Health stated this month that young drug addicts here need a drop-in centre facility to provide advice and support. This followed news that more than one fifth of youths aged 11-16 have used illegal drugs or solvents.

“Had a quick look at the Health Matters publication - It's short and snappy and pulls together quite a diverse range of issues. It's easy to read with a user friendly layout.”

Breedagh Hughes, Royal College of Midwives

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Health on the Hill

ASSEMBLY

Junior Minister Robin Newton raised the issue of 'legal highs' as part of a statement to the Assembly, by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, relating to the British-Irish Council meeting which dealt with the misuse of drugs. The Assembly heard that there was such concern about legal psychoactive substances that the issue is to be retained as a standing item on the agendas of BIC member administrations for the foreseeable future.

Later in the month Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey welcomed the decision to make the drug Mephedrone illegal. Home Secretary, Alan Johnson made the announcement following advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). Mephedrone and other cathinones will now be classified as Class B drugs. This means that people who possess the drug face up to five years in prison or an unlimited fine while those caught dealing it could face up to 14 years in prison. The decision came just five days after the Health Committee met to discuss the issue after the drug had been linked to several deaths.

The Minister also issued an options paper to his Executive colleagues regarding the potential ways forward on dealing with historical child abuse in Northern Ireland on the same day as he launched a new regional directory of services for victims and survivors of sexual violence and abuse. The Regional Directory of Services is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, bringing together details on the range of services available (statutory and voluntary) across the province. It is designed for easy access and use by victims and survivors of sexual violence and abuse as well as health professionals and others working in the sector.

Reacting to the publication of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety December 2009 Northern Ireland Waiting List Statistics, Michael

McGimpsey spoke out insisting that budget constraints continued to present trusts with a significant challenge in reducing hospital waiting times. The figures showed that at the end of December 2009, the number of patients waiting over nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment was 15,716. This represents an increase on the previous quarter when the figure was 4,559. The figures also showed that, at the end of December, there were 6,010 patients waiting longer than 13 weeks for surgery, compared to 2,975 in the previous quarter.

The increase in waiting times was also raised within the Stormont Health Committee with Dr Kieran Deeny stating the figures were shocking and very disappointing. He said the public and health professionals would be dismayed by the figures and he believed a continued overabundance of health service managers was adding to the problem.

The Committee was also briefed by Departmental officials on the General Report on the Health and Social Care Sector in Northern Ireland. However, much of the month's briefings and discussions focused on the Safeguarding Board Northern Ireland (SBNI.) The SBNI encompasses the regulation of areas of responsibility connected with child protection. Evidence was contributed by representatives from the police service.

The committee was also briefed on proposed sunbed regulations. The Chief Medical Officer, Dr Liz Mitchell, said there 400 sunbed outlets in Northern Ireland and that the cases of malignant melanoma had trebled in the past 25 years. The proposed bill aims to reduce the number of deaths and skin cancer cases from sunbed use by banning the commercial use of sunbeds by anyone under 18. The bill will also ban the hire/sale of sunbeds to anyone under 18 and ban unfounded claims about health benefits and sunbeds.

DEPARTMENTAL

As of the 1st April prescriptions charges for patients in Northern Ireland were abolished. The move follows the announcement by the Minister in September 2008 to introduce free prescriptions. Charging for prescriptions has already been abolished in Wales and is being phased out of the Scottish health system. England has abolished charges for cancer patients.

Proposals for a pilot scheme to provide local sporting clubs with defibrillator training to target cases of sudden cardiac death were announced. Local soccer, GAA, and rugby clubs, as well as Queen's University and the University of Ulster, have been asked if they would take part in the scheme. Up to 60 volunteers would initially be trained in the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and Emergency Life Support (ELS) skills.

REVIEWS

A review published of the Northern Ireland Tobacco Action Plan 2003-2008 highlights achievements in reducing the prevalence of smoking in Northern Ireland. These include the fact that smoking prevalence has reduced amongst all key target groups as well as among the general adult population and that there are now over 600 smoking cessation services in a range of settings across NI, including pharmacies, GP surgeries and community centres. These services have helped nearly 65,000 set quit dates from 2005/06 – 2008/09.

Asitis Consulting can provide an in-depth weekly monitoring service for clients. Phone or email for further details

Profile

Profile George O'Neill – Chairman, Belfast Local Commissioning Group

George O'Neill is the same age as the National Health. He has spent his entire working life first as a GP, and more recently as chair of the Belfast Local Commissioning Group.



He is just as passionate today as the day he qualified. Brought up on Joy Street in the Markets area of Belfast he says he regards it as a privilege to be able to make a difference to peoples' lives.

He still works as a doctor in a practice on the Springfield Road in the west of the City.

"I know all about the issues and problems that can affect inner city communities with high mortality and morbidity rates, dependence on legal and illegal drugs, alcohol problems, mental health issues, teenage pregnancies an elderly population marginalised and ignored, crime and the consequences of a dysfunctional education system .

"I enjoy work – it's really privilege and it means a lot to me. Although I've been a GP in north and west Belfast for almost 40 years I have not witnessed any improvement in outcomes for the population and this is in spite of the efforts of many and the investment of much."

"Every day I see good things happening in Health and Social Care but there are many areas we could do things better."

Dr O'Neill says some of the blame for

this lies in flawed thinking by the founders of the NHS. "It was assumed the health of the population would improve and therefore need and cost would not increase.

Bevin's Health Service has turned into an Illness Service. I think if we're to really make a difference we have to move from an Illness Service to a Wellness Service."

"The reality is that the health system is only part of the solution. In countries where the gap between rich and poor is less, the general health of the nation is better, so it's not so much about how we deal with illness, as how we address the broader issues."

He concedes that life expectancy has improved but points out that where he works; the average life expectancy is four years shorter than the people who live a mile and a half down the road.

Even this headline statistic masks even more disturbing trends. "Within some groups life expectancy is 20 to 30 years lower partly as a result of lifestyle, partly as a result of preventable disease. Within the travelling community the figures are worse still - not many males make it much past 50.

Dr O'Neill believes that progress is only possible with a multi-disciplinary multi-agency and multi-sectoral approach, breaking down silos sharing resources and surrendering a degree of autonomy.

"My vision is for a vertically integrated service by which I mean no barriers between primary, secondary and community care – no them and us. And horizontal integration i.e. the community charity and voluntary sectors, education and justice system, the local councils etc, everyone involved, all working together as a team."

He believes that more work needs to be done on the inter-generational aspects of deprivation, pointing to research which demonstrates that the life chances of a child depends on the educational attainments of the mother.

"For example – if the mother can cook with healthy ingredients; has learned to recognise minor ailments and is financial literate, you have the keys to making progress."

Dr O'Neill argues that much needs to be done to achieve change.

"People sometimes talk about the health service as being like an oil tanker where you turn the wheel and eventually it will change direction. The trouble with this oil tanker is

that it is holed before the waterline, there's oil coming out of the back and we've lost the rudder.

"What is required is leadership and risk takers – who are willing to let others take on part of the responsibility and to admit to having made mistakes.

"Real change will be driven from the bottom up. By that I mean front line staff working closely with planning commissioning and financial colleagues."

"Real change will be driven from the bottom up. By that I mean front line staff working closely with planning commissioning and financial colleagues."

Dr O'Neill admits to feeling frustrated at how long the local commissioning groups have taken to get going. "I've been in post for three years, but really started functioning from 1 April when local politicians joined the Commissioning Groups.

The Local Commissioning Groups are intent on discharging their statutory responsibilities to assess plan and ensure delivery of Health and Social Care to their resident population."

He says a key objective for him is to help ensure that health professionals marry responsibility with accountability.

"Whenever doctors write a prescription or make a referral when district nurses order a dressing or hospital colleagues carry out a procedure they are writing a cheque but they have no idea of the cost.

"Just take one example. Pathology labs cost around £70 million annually – and 50% of this work was commissioned by GPs who would not be aware of the cost.

There is an imperative all involved in Health and Social Care to be aware of the cost of their actions and not only must they be responsible but also accountable.

All areas of the Health and Social Care merit the scrutiny of evidenced based practice, with the benchmarking of performance against other areas to ensure best practice and value for money."

Dr O'Neill further opined "Change is not going to happen overnight and to ensure success we need to transform the ethos and culture of the service"

Diary Focus



Asitis Breakfast Forum with Jim Wells

Jim Wells, chair of the Assembly Health Committee was the latest keynote speaker at Asitis Consulting's hugely popular breakfast seminars.

The seminars are an ideal way for leaders involved in health to network with each other and gain insights into the thinking of key figures in the sector. All sessions are held under Charterhouse Rules and places are free of charge on a first come first served basis.

Mr Wells, who is a Democratic Unionist Party MLA for South Down told our guests about the challenges faced by his committee and his priorities for the future.

His is the fourth in our series. Previous speakers have included Marie Louise Connolly, BBC health correspondent; Brian Crowe, former director of policy with the Ulster Unionist Party and Glenn Houston, chief executive of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Social Media Masterclass

29th April 2010



On the 29th April, Asitis Consulting will be holding a social media masterclass in the Holiday Inn Belfast.

In this afternoon session we will bring delegates in contact with Dave Briggs - the leading authority on influencing the political process using online technology.

In 2004, Dave discovered his interest in social media and started to consider how it might be applied to his work in government - and started to blog about it. His presence was so effective and wide reaching that five years later he was working as a digital communications advisor at 10 Downing Street, adopting progressive new approaches to engaging with the public and key influencers.

Dave will be on hand to show delegates how they can utilise social technology in order to influence government. For more information on this workshop, or to register your place please email events@asitisconsulting.com

The Health Landscape of NI: One Year On...

19th May 2010

A compelling seminar no health professional can afford to miss will take place in Belfast next month

One year ago, the Northern Ireland health landscape was transformed with the establishment of a new organisational arrangements to replace the four Health and Social Services Boards, four Health and Social Services Councils and a number of agencies.

The new structure of health and social care bodies included the setting up of the Health and Social Care Board whilst the HSCB and its 5 Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs) assumed responsibility for the commissioning functions previously carried out by the four Health and Social Services Boards.

The Public Health Agency, the Business Services Agency and the Patient and Client Council also came into being at the same time. Shortly thereafter, Asitis Consulting

held a Face2Face seminar asking how the organisations would work, and what the challenges ahead were. Now, one year on, we will be holding another event, looking at how things are bedding down and what difficulties and opportunities are now facing the LCGs, and new health bodies.

Speakers already lined up include the Chairman of the Belfast Local Commissioning Group, George O'Neill, Chief Executive of the Public Health Agency Eddie Rooney and Chairman of the Health Committee Jim Wells. These events have uniformly proved to be successful, engaging and informative events, and we plan to secure more speakers prior to the event.

The event takes place at 9.30am at the Radisson Hotel at Belfast's gasworks on Wednesday 19th of May. For further information or to reserve a place please contact Asitis Consulting on 02890 438677 or e-mail events@asitisconsulting.com

"It is very well designed and does draw you to the articles...I definitely think you have a good tool here and the good design would make it stronger than many others that cross my own desk." Alan Walker, General Medical Council