Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the 11th issue of EPINews. In January, the SPHeRE Network held their Annual Meeting at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin and the Department was very well represented with 7 oral and 3 poster presentations. The theme of this year’s meeting was ‘Supporting solutions: Connecting Research, Policy and Practice’ and many of our staff and students were present to showcase their research in various areas ranging from emergency care to the management of obesity.

Since the last issue, many of our PhD Students have defended their theses. Congratulations are in order for Dr Sarah Fitzgerald, Dr Jamie Madden, Dr Dervla Hogan and Dr Seán Millar. We wish you all the best for your future careers.

This issue is once again packed full with news, research updates, events and training opportunities and as always, I would encourage you to circulate EPINews among your colleagues and direct any queries or comments to me at emily.kelleher@ucc.ie

Ms. Emily Kelleher

DEPARTMENT NEWS

Wellcome Trust International Funders’ Award

Congratulations to Dr Sheena McHugh, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health and Dr Carol Sinnott, Department of General Practice who were among five University College Cork Professional Skills for Research Leaders of 2015 to be chosen to participate in the Wellcome Trust International Funders’ Award in Management Skills for Researchers pilot programme. The programme which has the key objective, via researcher development, to increase the productivity of research teams, make less mistakes and as a result have increased chance of success in grant applications in the future. Once completed, Sheena and Carol will become some of the first researchers in the world to have the International Funders’ Award certificate.
NHSRI Research Day

On 10th November the National Health Services Research Institute (NHSRI) hosted the annual College of Medicine and Health Research Day. The overall theme of the day was Health Services Research and it highlighted the diverse range of translational health research being conducted on diabetes, mental health and health systems research in University College Cork.

Prof Patricia Kearney chaired the first session of the day, during which, delegates heard from three Department of Epidemiology and Public Health PhD students; Ms Marsha Treacy, Ms Kate O’Neill and Ms Fiona Riordan. Prof Sarah Wild, Professor of Epidemiology at the Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics, in the University of Edinburgh gave a keynote address entitled ‘Improving outcomes of diabetes: The Scottish approach’.

The second session focused on mental health services research and members of the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) were present to share their work. Prof Ella Arensman, director of research at the NSRF, spoke of the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programmes related to suicide and self-harm. Following Ella, Dr. Christina Dillon, Ms Caroline Daly and Ms Grace O’ Regan presented their research on alcohol and self-harm, intentional drug overdose and the profile of people presenting to hospital with high risk suicidal behaviour, respectively.

The last session of the research day highlighted research being conducted specific to health services research and was chaired by Prof John Browne, part-time Director of the NHSRI. Dr. Colm Henry, National Clinical Advisor and Group Lead Acute Hospitals in the Health Service Executive, opened this session with a presentation on hospitals and healthcare in Ireland. Dr Paul Corcoran, Dr Sharon Cadogan and Ms Brenda Lynch also presented their research on severe maternal morbidity, immunoglobulin testing in primary care and outcome indicators for emergency conditions, respectively.

Prof Ivan Perry, Head of Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, UCC and Dr. Cliodhna Foley Nolan, Director of Human Health and Nutrition, Safefood closed the research day with prize giving for best oral in each of the three sessions and also awarded three best posters.

Congratulations to Marsha, Caroline and Brenda who were awarded with prizes for their oral presentations on attendance for retinopathy screening, intentional drug overdose and outcome indicators for emergency conditions, respectively. Over 20 posters were showcased at the research day with Dr Conor Foley, Niall McTernon and Mary Tobin winning best posters for their research on urgent and emergency care system reconfiguration, media reporting of suicide and traveller community health workers experience of grief, respectively.

The National Health Services Research Institute is a development within The Department of Epidemiology and Public Health in University College Cork, made possible by capital investment from the Higher Education Authority of Ireland. Though based at UCC, the Institute is supported by a national collaboration of universities, State agencies and private sector enterprises.
New members of ASPHER

The Department of Epidemiology & Public Health was unanimously accepted as a full member of ASPHER (Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region). Coincidentally this occasion marked ASPHER’s 50th anniversary, since its foundation from a World Health Organisation initiative in 1966. From small beginnings, ASPHER is now a leading player among independent European public health organisations. It has 112+ full members from 43 countries, as well as 14+ associate members from across the globe. ASPHER describes its mission as being dedicated to strengthening the role of public health by improving education and training of public health professionals for both practice and research. It does this by promoting collaboration and exchange of ideas between public health organisations and practitioners at all levels, across different forums. The remit is extensive and includes undergraduate, masters and doctoral students as well as existing practitioners and researchers. Of particular interest to some might be their ‘Young Researchers Forum’ providing an opportunity to network with others from a range of different backgrounds. Having said that, we all have much to offer and much to gain by being part of the ASPHER community going forward!

Dr Fiona McLeod, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, at ASPHER Deans’ and Directors’ Retreat in Athens, Greece

Congratulations to Dr Seán Millar

Congratulations are in order for Dr Seán Millar who successfully defended his PhD thesis entitled “A Comparative Evaluation of Surrogate Measures of Adiposity as Indicators of Cardiometabolic Disease”. Seán’s PhD research, which was supervised by Dr Catherine Phillips and co-supervised by Prof Ivan Perry, examined anthropometric measures and their utility for assessing cardiometabolic risk and discriminating patients with type 2 diabetes within clinical practice. Since completing his PhD, Seán has taken up position as a Research Support Officer with the Irish focal point of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) where he is responsible for the preparation of annual reports detailing the prevalence of illicit substance use in Ireland, harms and harm reductions related to drug use, and substance abuse in prisons. He is also a regular contributor to Drugnet Ireland, the quarterly newsletter of the Alcohol and Drug Research Unit of the HRB. Established in 1993 and based in Lisbon Portugal, the EMCDDA is one of the EU’s decentralised agencies and exists to provide the EU and its Member States with a factual overview of European drug problems and a solid evidence base to support the drugs debate. Today it offers policymakers the data they need for drawing up informed drug laws and strategies. We would like to wish Seán all the best for his future career.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS


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ICE Conference 2017: Career Pathways for Early Stage Researchers

On Wednesday, 11th January over 80 early career researchers came together in the Fitzwilliam Hotel in Dublin for the Health Research Board (HRB) Interdisciplinary Capacity Enhancement (ICE) Conference 2017: Career Pathways for Early Stage Researchers day. The event was sponsored by the Health Research Board in collaboration with the 3rd annual SPHeRE conference and focused on providing useful career information to early career researchers, including PhDs and post-docs. Dr Annalisa Montesanti, HRB Programme Manager, opened the event with a presentation on the HRB’s Health Research Career Framework. Dr Montesanti was followed by two keynote addresses; Prof Patricia Kearney, HRB Research Leader UCC, who spoke about “transitioning to leadership”, drawing on reflections of her own career path while Dr Eibhlin Hudson, Real World Data Analytics Lead at Novartis, gave insight on her route into industry. These keynotes were followed by four presentations; Dr Leonard Browne, ICE Postdoctoral Research Fellow, UCC, provided an overview of the HRB ICE Awards; Dr Sandra Galvin, Coordinator HRB-TMRN, and QUESTS Steering Group member, spoke about alternative routes post PhD; Dr Sheena McHugh, CARDI Research Fellow UCC, provided insights into how to get funded and finally Dr Jenny McSharry, Assistant Director/Postdoctoral Researcher Health Behaviour Change Research Group, outlined a proposal for the development of a population health and health services research post-doc network. Thank you to Dr Karen Matvienko-Sika, Dr Elaine Toomey, Dr Leonard Browne, Dr Michelle Queally and Dr Aimee Fox for organizing this event.

Congratulations to Dr Matvienko-Sika

Congratulations to Dr Karen Matvienko-Sika on recently receiving two awards. Karen received an Irish Research Council New Foundations Award for the project “Developing a Core Outcome Set of Infant Feeding Outcomes for Obesity Prevention Interventions”. The project will engage expert stakeholders in infant feeding to develop a set of core infant feeding outcomes for inclusion in childhood obesity trials. The project also involves a knowledge exchange and dissemination event to be held in conjunction with the Association for the Study of Obesity on the island of Ireland (ASOI) conference on May 4th 2017. Karen has also recently received a Royal Irish Academy Charlemont Grant. This is a high-impact travel grants scheme aimed at early-career postdoctoral researchers and was awarded for the project: ‘Determining the most feasible and acceptable methods of cortisol sampling in pregnancy’. Karen will be collaborating with colleagues in the Psychophysiology and Stress Research Group in Westminster University for this project.

EU Innovation commissioner visits WGB

EU Innovation Commissioner, Carlos Moedas officially opened University College Cork’s flagship innovation building, Western Gateway. As part of his visit, the Commissioner met with a number of spinout companies including Skellig Surgical Ltd, a new and innovative Medical Devices Company and Food Choice at Work (FCW). FCW represents a groundbreaking approach to workplace health. Dr Fiona Geaney, Chief Executive Officer and the main founder of the FCW programme, outlined how the programme is an exciting spin-out company from the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health and has been supported by the HRB Centre for Health and Diet Research. FCW is an evidence based, sustainable workplace health programme that has been proven to deliver significant improvements in employee health and to generate a positive return on investment to employers by lowering employee absenteeism. To keep up to date with FCW you can join the conversation on their Twitter Page @foodchoice_work.
Once again there as great representation from the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health with 7 oral presentations and 3 poster presentations. In the Maternal and Child Health Session, Dr Aimee Fox presented her research on the cost of pre-eclampsia in the health system while Ms Caragh Flannery and Ms Emily Kelleher presented their research on obesity during pregnancy and childhood, respectively. During this session Dr Elaine Toomey, NUIG presented work entitled ‘Development of an evidence-based pilot intervention to promote healthy infant feeding behaviours in Irish primary care’ on behalf of Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar. After lunch, Ms Kate O’Neill presented her work on the costs associated with diabetes while Dr Conor Foley and Ms Brenda Lynch presented their work in the session on Healthcare Reform. During the poster session a number of our colleagues showcased their research including SPHeRE scholars Rebecca Dennehy and Sarah-Jane Flaherty who presented their posters on cyberbullying and healthier food purchasing behaviour, respectively. Ms Emily Kelleher also had a poster which focused on family attendance at a community-based childhood obesity programme. Prof Ella Arensman of the National Suicide Research Foundation presented a powerful key-note speech entitled ‘Self-harm and suicide in young people: Associated risk factors and evidence based interventions’.

Success for Dr Paul Corcoran at RAMI
The Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland in association with the Irish Journal of Medical Science held the first RAMI Research Awards last November. The awards were open to all those involved in Irish medical research who had a clinical research paper published in an indexed journal. Congratulations to Dr Paul Corcoran who won the Public Health Category with his paper entitled ‘Impact of the economic recession and subsequent austerity on suicide and self harm in Ireland: An interrupted time series analysis’ which found that five years of economic recession and austerity in Ireland have had a significant negative impact on rates of suicide in men and on self-harm in both sexes. Read the full text here.

HITS Study
Research from University College Cork has shown that practicing employed and self-employed therapists in Ireland - including chartered physiotherapists, physical therapists and athletics therapists - are more likely to suffer from work-related upper limb disorders. The Study, funded by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health and conducted by researchers from the Department of Epidemiology & Public Health, under the leadership of Dr Birgit Greiner, reviewed existing international health and safety guidance for these occupations. The research has shown that work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs) are persistent in 83% of therapists, with reported symptoms in at least one upper limb region in the past year, with 55% reporting symptoms that lasted for over 3 days. Shoulders (53 %), neck (50 %) and thumbs (46 %) were the most affected sites. Over a third (37 %) had at least one clinical diagnosis of the upper limbs, e.g. shoulder tendinitis (13 %) or overuse syndrome (12 %). For one in four therapists, symptoms were incapacitating so that they could not carry out normal activities at work, home or during leisure time. First onset of symptoms was mainly within the first five years of practice or even as early as during training. The study represents a comprehensive approach to this wide-ranging professional issue and provides awareness through practical guidance, training and checklists for professionals and students to improve the way they understand their health, safety and wellbeing.
Visit of Delegation from Japan

In October, a delegation of two senior representatives working in suicide prevention and research in Japan visited the National Suicide Research Foundation and the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. The aim of their visit was to learn about surveillance and recording systems for self-harm and suicide in Ireland, including the National Self-Harm Registry Ireland, the Suicide Support and Information System and intervention and prevention programmes for self-harm and suicide.

The delegation involved:
- Professor Yoshihide Sorimachi, Forensic Pathologist, Head of the Promotion Office for Community Suicide Policy and Head of the National Centre for Neurology and Psychiatry in Tokyo
- Professor Kenji Ishihara, former Secretary to the Minister for Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan, and Director of the Education and Research Centre of Legal Medicine, Chiba University

Throughout the week, Professor Sorimachi and Professor Ishihara visited various different stakeholders to learn about surveillance systems and suicide research and prevention in Ireland, including the National Office for Suicide Prevention, the Department of Health in Dublin, the Central Statistics Office, the office of the Cork county Coroner and the office of the Assistant State Pathologist. Both the National Suicide Research Foundation and the Department were delighted to host them and look forward to collaborating in the future.

Charlemont Grants

Congratulations to Dr Sheena McHugh and Dr Leonard Browne, both Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, who were recently awarded with Royal Irish Academy Charlemont Grants. Sheena’s application entitled ‘Characterising a Falls Prevention Intervention for Older People to Improve Implementation Success in the Health Service’ will allow her to visit the Gillings School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill to work with experts in implementation science on the use of implementation strategies in the health service. Leonard was awarded a Charlemont Grant to conduct research into "Analysing Physical Activity Patterns of an Irish Cohort of Middle Aged Men and Women Using a Functional Data Analysis Approach". As part of the award Dr Browne has travelled to Columbia University in NYC, USA to collaborate with Professor Jeff Goldsmith and colleagues in the Department of Biostatistics in applying FDA techniques to this dataset and others.

Graduations Galore!

Congratulations to our very first online cohort of MSc in Occupational Health students, who commenced on their MSc journey in January 2015 and recently graduated. The programme integrates occupational health and safety into a multidisciplinary perspective. It offers students the opportunity to study modern cutting-edge scientific concepts and research evidence on causation, prevention and management of work-related accidents, injury and disease. The interactive format of the teaching sessions is conducive to student networking and the sharing of knowledge and practical experience. In several modules students will work with practical case studies, engage in project work and reflective inquiry. Please note, the online MSc in Occupational Health commences on the 21st of August and we are now accepting applications. Our online Master of Public Health also commences, again, on the 21st of August.
MSc Occupational Health Graduate Profile: Deirdre Desmond

Deirdre Desmond is a recent MSc Occupational Health graduate who published a qualitative study investigating the barriers to returning to work for breastfeeding mothers in Ireland. The study received significant traction with the media, with an article featuring in Cork's popular Evening Echo and an appearance on Ireland AM to discuss it.

Deirdre’s experience is a great example of how a thesis can extend its reach beyond assessment, inform policy and in turn impact on workplace practices. Her research was one of the first studies on the experiences of mothers who continue to breastfeed after their return to work in Ireland. The findings of this study illustrate that mothers with the desire to continue to breastfeed after their return to work did so with some difficulty. Many did not disclose to their employers that they were breastfeeding and did not make enquiries about being facilitated to continue to breastfeed after their return to the workplace. Encouraging and facilitating women to continue to breastfeed after they return to work will help to normalise breastfeeding within Irish culture and promote continued breastfeeding as a viable option for working mothers. For more on Deirdre’s research visit the paper in the International Breastfeeding Journal.

Deirdre also participated in a focused marketing campaign for the MSc in Occupational Health which resulted in one of the largest and most diverse cohorts since the programme’s inception. Deirdre, with the help of the very talented Barrie Tyner, produced a video detailing her experiences of the MSc in Occupational Health. She says “I was attracted to the course not due to health and safety because I had no health and safety background and it wasn’t hugely my interest at the time but it was the human side of the course that I was attracted to at first, psychosocial epidemiology, training and development and law… it was the humanity of the course that attracted it to me first day, that people were the focus of this course”. Wishing Deirdre the very best.

MEET...

Dr Birgit Greiner

Dr Birgit Greiner received her MSc in Psychology from the Technical University Berlin, a Masters in Public Health, a PhD in Epidemiology from the University of California Berkeley and a Dr. rer.med.habil from the University of Greifswald in Germany.

Birgit joined the Department of Epidemiology & Public Health as Senior Lecturer in 2003. In an endeavor to combine her two educational disciplines, social epidemiology and occupational psychology, she focused her research on the impact of working conditions on physical and mental health, injury and safety in the working population. Specifically, Birgit created an evidence base on the role of work characteristics for cardiovascular risk factors, cardiovascular health, musculoskeletal disorders, mental health and health inequalities in Germany, the United States, the UK and Ireland. Research populations included office work, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare and hospitality work. For example, Birgit headed a team that investigated the impact of the Irish Workplace smoking ban on health and smoking prevalence in bar workers. Other research focused on the physical and psychosocial determinants of work-related musculoskeletal injuries and depression in healthcare workers. In collaboration with Prof Ella Arensman from the National Suicide Research Foundation Birgit is currently investigating psychiatric, psychosocial and workplace factors associated with suicide and self-harm in Ireland. One of her main contributions internationally has been the development of methods based on observational job analysis for the objective measurement of psychosocial work conditions. Birgit is also a member of the Executive Committee of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology.

Did you know? Birgit loves singing and has been performing with a Community Choir in Skibbereen (West Cork Choral Singers) for many years. One of the highlights of her ‘stage career’ has been to perform as background singer with international Rockstar Black and Irish singer/songwriter Fergus O’Farrell.
UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAINING

March
N&G 2017 – the 4th International Conference on Nutrition and Growth, Amsterdam, 2-4th March, The Netherlands
ICOHS 2017: 19th International Conference on Occupational Health and Safety, 9-10th March, Miami, USA
Scientific Publishing Success: from Research to Acceptance, 21st March, London, UK
Patient & Public Involvement in Medical Research, 23rd March, London, UK
Spring Conference 2017: Nutrition and exercise for health and performance, 28-29th March, Stirling, Scotland

April
International Society for Pharmacoepidemiology (ISPE), 1-4th April, London, UK
15th World Congress on Public Health, 3-7 April 2017, Melbourne, Australia
Statistics for Nutrition Research, 20th April, London, UK
International Forum on Quality and Safety in healthcare, 26-28th April, London, UK
Talking about the next generation: Nutrition in school age children, 27th April, London, UK

May
Introduction to Food Policy, 16th May, London, UK
ECO2017: European Congress on Obesity, 17-20th May, Porto, Portugal
10th International Conference on Nightlife, Substance Use and related Health, 24th May, Dublin, Ireland

June
SCOPE School Athens 2017 – An obesity primer: From epidemiology to treatment, 3rd June, Athens, Greece
International Society for Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity Annual Conference, 7-10th June, Victoria, Canada
SCOPE School London 2017: What are the causes of obesity and what can we do about it? 13th June, London, UK
Irish Section Conference 2017: What governs what we eat? 21-23rd June, Belfast, UK
Physical activity and the prevention of chronic diseases, 29th June - 1st July, Regensburg, Germany

July
22nd Annual Congress of The European College Sport Science - Sport Science In A Metropolitan Area, 5-8th July, Düsseldorf, Germany
Summer Conference 2017: Improving nutrition in metropolitan areas, 10-12th July, London, UK
ICOPH: 3rd International Conference on Public Health, 27-29th July, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

August
IEA World Congress of Epidemiology, 19-22nd August 2017, Saitama, Japan

September
Society for Social Medicine Annual Meeting, 6-8th September, Manchester, UK
UKCO2017: Obesity, Health and Social Inequalities, 7th September, Wales, UK
FFC's 22nd International Conference on Functional Foods and Chronic Diseases, 22-23rd September, Boston, MA, USA

The Methods of Translating and Disseminating Epidemiology into Public Health, 24-26th September, New Orleans, Louisiana
International Society for Environmental Epidemiology: ISEE 2017, 24-28th September, Sydney, Australia

October
IUNS 21st International Congress of Nutrition (ICN), 15-20th October, Buenos Aires, Argentina

November
10th European Public Health Conference - Sustaining resilient and healthy communities, 1-4th November, Stockholm, Sweden
Obesity and Reproduction: The cradle of the Epidemic, 9 – 10th November, Leuven, Belgium
27th European Childhood Obesity Group Annual Congress, 15-17th November, Rome, Italy

Ongoing
Stata courses
Stata training

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