

## **SPH News**

The School of Public Health

Newsletter

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#### **WELCOME**

Dear Colleagues,

It fills me with joy to receive, and to share with you, updates of the latest achievements and research publications, introductions to new staff members, and news of past and upcoming events undertaken within and beyond the limits of the School of Public Health at University College Cork. A new year has commenced, and the Government of Ireland has lifted many of the COVID-19 restrictions. While we should continue to do all that we can to limit the transmission of the virus in our environment and the wider community, we are now moving into a different phase in our response to the pandemic. Professor Ivan Perry, Dean of the School of Public Health, is working with colleagues on the School's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee to finalise plans for a phased return to working on Campus and the resumption of campus-based teaching.

Best wishes.

Dr Ana Contreras Navarro

Editor





## WE WELCOME YOUR SUBMISSIONS

SPH News is published quarterly by the School of Public Health, University College Cork. Please send comments or questions to Ana Contreras Navarro at acontrerasnavarro@ucc.ie.

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#### **SCHOOL NEWS**

## New HRB Collaborative Doctoral Award: MHAINTAIN



Under the Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDA) 2021, in November, Professor Ella Arensman and the **MHAINTAIN** consortium were awarded €1.5 million for a new research training programme:

Early Identification of Suicide and Self-Harm Risk and Comorbid Mental and PHysical Disorders: An INterdisciplinary TrAining, Research and InterventioN Programme (MHAINTAIN).

The **MHAINTAIN** Consortium involves two Co-Leads: Professor Eugene Cassidy and Dr Paul Corcoran, and ten Core Partners.

**MHAINTAIN** will address the need for doctoral training and career paths to improve early identification and intervention in suicide and self-harm risk. It will comprise four Doctoral Projects with the following focus areas:

- Early identification of risk of self-harm and suicide and comorbid mental disorders among people diagnosed with cancer and chronic respiratory illnesses.
- 2. The impact of an improved Cognitive Behaviour Therapy programme on self-harm patients in terms of neuropsychological and biological markers.
- **3.** Early identification of risk factors for repeated self-harm in children and adolescents aged 10-18.
- **4.** Services and supports to minimise risk of suicide, self-harm and comorbid mental and physical health outcomes during public health emergencies.

Doctoral projects one, three and four will each involve one PhD Scholar, and project two will involve two PhD Scholars.

MHAINTAIN involves an interdisciplinary team of researchers, health professionals and people with lived experience, from the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF), University College Cork (UCC), Clinical Research Facility, Cork (CRF-C), University College Dublin (UCD), National Office for Suicide Prevention, and international partners from City University of London, Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention, Griffith University, the University of Melbourne, and the University of Massachusetts (continued on next page).

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Prof Ella Arensman

The **MHAINTAIN** Consortium is a newly formed interdisciplinary consortium, its purpose is to guide and support PhD scholars in the MHAINTAIN research-through training programmes. The core partners and lead partners represent all essential disciplines to support and supervise five PhD scholars in the four doctoral research projects, including public health, adult psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry, neuroscience, psychology, biostatistics, clinical trials and implementation science. The **MHAINTAIN** Consortium will have a close collaboration with the SPHeRE programme in facilitating the training programme and annual review panels for the scholars.

The strong interdisciplinary networks represented by the **MHAINTAIN** Consortium, will provide a very stimulating environment for the PhD scholars involved in the **MHAINTAIN** training programme, which will also facilitate postdoctoral career opportunities following completion of the PhD research. In addition to interdisciplinary research internships within UCC, the **MHAINTAIN** programme will also facilitate opportunities for PhD scholars to arrange external internships at AISRAP, Griffith University, Brisbane, the University of Melbourne and the University of Massachusetts.

According to Prof Ella Arensman of the NSRF-UCC leadership team:

"By integrating expertise from all relevant disciplines and involving a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from patient advocacy, this innovative training programme will improve knowledge and expertise."

"In addition, the highly experienced partners will bring added value to the training and research programme by facilitating interdisciplinary research and training placements for the PhD scholars."





### School of Public Health

## **Seminar Series 2021**

The School of Public Health Seminar Series aims to provide insights into a range of topics across the spectrum of public health, including research, policy, and practice. The School's very successful 2021 series included topics from diverse disciplines and different perspectives focused on public health aspects of COVID-19, as well as many other public health related topics.

"Seminars such as these are always important to exchange knowledge, facilitate the sharing of accurate and reliable information, and to inform discussion. However, it is even more vital that factually correct and well-researched information is communicated to us all during this pandemic". -Prof Patricia Kearney, School of Public Health, UCC.

In 2021, seminars were organised by Ms Edel Burton (Pharmacist and HRB SPHeRE/CDA in Chronic Disease Prevention PhD Scholar) supported by Prof Patricia Kearney. In addition, Caroline Seacy worked with Edel to promote the SPH seminars to the UCC Community and beyond. The seminars were held online, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and ran from January to December 2021, with a break in proceedings over the summer months.

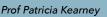
## Meet some of our speakers from our 2021 SPH Seminar Series

Top row (from L-R): Dr Aileen O'Carroll, Dr Anne Moore, Ms Orla Hegarty

Centre: Dr Niall Conroy

Bottom row: (from L-R): Dr Eithne Hunt, Prof Don Ross, Dr Darren Dahly







Ms Edel Burton

Seminars were presented by local, national and international subject experts, and covered topics from ventilation and vaccination to archiving qualitative research data and the Australian approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this series, the first UCC School of Public Health's Summer Research Student Seminar and Postgraduate Student Research Seminar were held. These seminars offered a platform for talented undergraduate and Master of Public Health Students to present their research, conducted in the School of Public Health, both to the UCC community and externally.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the seminar presenters and to those who joined us online, all of whom contributed to the success of the 2021 Series.

Videos of the 2021 seminars and details about the upcoming 2022 School of Public Health's Seminar Series can be found on this link:

https://www.ucc.ie/en/publichealth/

Ms Edel Burton













## **UCC Research Projects 'Enhancing Civic Society'**



Dr Zubair Kabir

Dr Zubair Kabir in the UCC School of Public Health has recently been working with Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI) on two projects funded by the Irish Research Council's New Foundations scheme 'Enhancing Civic Society' which supports projects between researchers and civic society groups in the community and voluntary sector. AAI is the national independent advocate for reducing alcohol harm. It was highly instrumental in advancing the development and passage of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 (PHAA), the first legislation to take a public health approach to alcohol control and is now working towards its full implementation.

Ireland has high levels of alcohol use and with that comes a range of harms. However, understanding the alcohol burden requires timely data and for this information to be brought to the attention of policy makers to inform the alcohol control measures needed to address the issues. It is also important for the wider public to have an appreciation of the harms from alcohol both for the health of individuals and to support broad population health measures and their implementation to reduce alcohol use.

#### Global Burden of Disease

The first of the projects utilised data from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD). UCC researchers analysed GBD Ireland data from 2019 to obtain an estimate of years of life lost (YLLs), and years lost due to disability (YLDs) as a result of alcohol use in Ireland. The estimated total number of deaths in 2019 attributable to alcohol was found to be 1,543. The analysis indicates that previous measures of alcohol related deaths and illnesses are underestimated and that 5% of all deaths in Ireland in 2019 are attributable to alcohol compared to earlier estimates of 3.7%.

The data gives further weight to arguments for serious consideration of alcohol control measures. In particular, it is clear given the harms outlined, that full implementation of the PHAA is urgently needed. Outstanding areas of the legislation include controls on advertising content, a broadcast watershed for advertisements and labelling of alcohol products with health information including cancer warnings.

Alcohol Action Ireland is bringing this data to an audience beyond the academic health community through the development of policy papers for distribution to politicians and officials as well as through a webinar and social media campaigns.

### **Structural Separation**

A second project has also been funded which will examine levels of compliance with regulations which form part of the PHAA.

Alcohol is 'no ordinary product' and from November 2020 supermarkets, convenience stores and neighbourhood shops, can no longer display alcohol as a routine grocery and that children's exposure to alcohol in an everyday setting is limited.

Bringing alcohol control measures into a statutory framework is essential but equally important is ensuring compliance, particularly in the early stages of their adoption so that a clear message is given to the public.



## Are tougher regulations on paracetamol availability justified?

**Content warning:** This article contains sensitive material and mention of self-harm methods, which some readers may find distressing. If you need support at this time, please refer to the services listed below.

For many of us paracetamol is never far away. It's in our bags, our kitchens, and our bathroom cabinets. When needed, anyone can restock from our nearest corner shop. To me the availability of paracetamol warrants questioning and address, and I will explain why.

I'm a Postdoctoral Researcher at the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) with a particular interest in preventing intentional drug overdose (IDO). At the NSRF we record self-harm acts which result in presentation to hospital in every emergency department in Ireland. Paracetamol is the drug most frequently taken in intentional overdose, accounting for approximately 2,300 presentations each year. Most people who take paracetamol in overdose are female aged under 25. Many IDOs by young people are clinically serious, and as a result the risk of liver transplant following paracetamol overdose in Ireland is 6 times the European average. Such physical consequences of IDO occur in tandem with social and psychosocial impacts on individuals and their wider circles. Worryingly, paracetamol IDOs by young people are increasing each year.

Restricting access to means of self-harm and suicide is the single most effective prevention measure, working best when implemented concurrently with government-led measures. Statutory legislation in Ireland since 2001 restricts the sale of over-the-counter paracetamol to a maximum pack of 24 tablets in pharmacies and 12 tablets in non-pharmacy outlets, with authorisation for one pack to be sold per transaction. These restrictions have led to a decrease in deaths involving paracetamol and a reduction in the toxicity of IDOs. However pack-size restrictions have been shown to have no effect on the frequency of paracetamol IDOs and Ireland still has one of the highest incidences of IDOs in Europe.

So where can we go from here? In recent years two measures have shown promise in reducing or preventing paracetamol IDO. Paracetamol overdose is significantly lower in countries where the sale of paracetamol is restricted to pharmacies only. There are costs to implementing such a measure in Ireland, predominantly to those who use paracetamol safely; however, the benefits in terms of potential reductions in self-harm and overuse of paracetamol are likely to be much greater. In Denmark, confining the sale of paracetamol to those aged 18 and over has also led to significant reductions in their overdose. It seems inconceivable that paracetamol can be sold to a child without question, considering its potential harms; especially when we have a justifiable stance against the sale of alcohol to this same subgroup.

With each paracetamol IDO that we record I am assured that further regulations are not only justified but essential to addressing IDO and self-harm here in Ireland. Many colleagues and I are working to address the concerning rise of paracetamol IDOs. Supported by much evidence, an interdisciplinary working group has been established to review and implement effective interventions to reduce access to paracetamol in Ireland. I hope that in time and with evidenced measures in place, I might report back with positive news about reductions in paracetamol IDOs in Ireland.

Dr Caroline Daly, Postdoctoral Researcher working on the National Self-Harm Registry Ireland and the Northern Ireland Self-Harm Registry Ireland, at the National Suicide Research Foundation

If you have been affected by this article, please contact the relevant support services:

Samaritans: Freephone: 116 123, text: 087 2 60 90 90, email: jo@samaritans.ie, visit: www.samaritans.org

Pieta: Telephone: 1800 247 247, text: HELP to 51444,email: mary@pieta.ie, visit: www.pieta.ie/

### **News from the CATCH Project**

The CATCH Project stands for **C**ommunication and **A**ction through **T**ree-planting for **C**limate-**H**ealth and is led by Dr Christie Godsmark. The project has produced an animation on climate change, health, and some co-benefits of climate action. You can watch the video here: <a href="https://youtu.be/Zf8XQ5cPMA4">https://youtu.be/Zf8XQ5cPMA4</a> and why not share it with your friends, families, students and colleagues!



The CATCH project concluded with native tree-planting. Sixteen participants from the project were given a native tree to plant on their own property. A Crab Apple (Malus sylvestris) tree, native to Ireland, was planted in 2021 as a project tree, and to acknowledge the benefits that trees can provide to the environment, health and society. The tree was planted near the entrance to the Environmental Research Institute.





Some photos of the tree above

## Congratulations!



Congratulations to Dr Niamh McGrath who passed her PhD viva voce examination in January. Niamh's PhD thesis is entitled "Recognising Emotional Aspects of Diabetes (READ) Study; Understanding Detection of Diabetes Distress and Depression Among People with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in Community Settings". Niamh's PhD thesis was supervised by colleagues in the UCC School of Public Health, Professor Patricia Kearney and Dr Sheena McHugh and the

UL School of Allied Health, Dr Elaine Toomey. Niamh completed her PhD training through the Structured Population Health-services Research Education (SPHeRE) Programme.

Niamh was a previous editor of the Newsletter (EPINews). We wish her all the best in her new position at the Health Research Board.



Dr Frank O'Riordan successfully defended his PhD thesis, titled "Opportunities to measure and improve antimicrobial stewardship in the Irish hospital setting". Frank was supervised by Dr Aoife Fleming, Dr Frances Shiely and Professor Stephen Byrne. Congratulations!

# European initiative 'Joint Action Best-ReMaP' to reduce unhealthy food marketing to children



The School's Food Policy Research Team and the Department of Health (DoH) are working together with the Directorate-General of Health, Portugal, and the Open University in the European initiative 'Joint Action (JA) Best-ReMaP'. As co-leader of Work Package 6 of the JA, the Irish Team, led by Ms Ursula O'Dwyer from the Healthy Ireland Division at the DoH and by Professor Ivan Perry, is currently developing technical guidance to support countries and European Union Member States on the implementation of best practices in the design, use, evaluation, and monitoring of marketing codes, to reduce the exposure and the power of commercial promotions of unhealthy foods and drinks to children and adolescents.



Work Package 6

The costly marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages that are high in saturated fat, trans-fatty acids, sugar or salt (HFSS) to children and adolescents is a characteristic of what is known in the field of public health and nutrition research as "obesogenic environment". In an obesogenic environment, food choices of children, their parents, and caretakers, are shaped by industry marketing and greater access to HFSS foods, along with inadequate levels of physical activity. If children's caloric intake from what they eat and drink exceed their individual energy requirements on a habitual basis, overweight is likely to occur. In Europe, the prevalence of overweight in children under-five years old was 8.3% in 2020 and, worldwide, over 340 million children aged 5-19 years were overweight or obese in 2016. Unhealthy diets and childhood obesity are pressing societal issues as these represent major risk factors in the development of disease, negatively impacting children's right to health.

In March this year, Ms Ursula O'Dwyer, Professor Ivan Perry, Dr Janas Harrington, Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar and Dr Ana Contreras Navarro, will organise a workshop for country partners with the participation of Mr Tom James, Head of Healthy Ireland, DoH. You can learn more about the JA here: <a href="https://bestremap.eu">https://bestremap.eu</a>

#### **SPH Research of International Interest**

Dr Maria Roura has led a qualitative assessment of the EC-funded program "Health System Strengthening for <u>Universal Health Coverage</u> Programme Phase IV" implemented by WHO in 115 countries.

She has also qualitatively assessed the "Safe and Far" inter-agency UN programme "Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region" implemented by ILO and UN Women in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region (ilo.org)



### **Updates from the NSRF**

#### **World Mental Health Day Virtual Seminar**

The NSRF hosted a webinar on 'Suicide, Self-Harm and Mental Health' on 18th October. The webinar was attended by over 100 people and included keynote lectures from Dr Michael J Kelleher (South London and Maudsley NHS) and Dr Mark Sinyor (University of Toronto). Afternoon masterclasses included the following topics:

- Mental Health promotion & suicide prevention in children & adolescents
- Impact of COVID-19 on suicide & self-harm
- Bereavement following suicide
- Assessment & Management of self-harm: Challenges & Innovation



#### First WHO Collaborating Centres' Regional Meeting

On 2nd and 3rd November, Professor Ella Arensman, Ms Eileen Williamson and Mr Niall McTernan attended the first Regional Meeting of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centres (WHO CC), identifying common areas of work to strengthen cooperation on United Action For Better Health.

Read more about the activities of the NSRF-WHO CC on page 27 of the Annual Report, available here: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/35zs7uk7">https://tinyurl.com/35zs7uk7</a>.

#### First C-SSHRI Get Together

The Connecting Suicide and Self-Harm Researchers on the island of Ireland (C-SSHRI) collaboration held their first meeting on 30th November.

The aim of this exciting project is to enhance collaboration between researchers across the island of Ireland,

facilitate a wider dissemination of research findings, increase awareness of ongoing research, and through combined experience and expertise, create a 'community of influence' with respect to suicide and self-harm policy and commissioned research.



## **Keynote lecture IASR/ AFSP conference**

On 24th October, Prof Ella
Arensman presented a plenary
lecture at the IASR/AFSP
International Summit on
Suicide Research. The
presentation provided an
update on the implementation
and evaluation of National
Suicide Prevention Strategies.

Access the slides here: https://tinyurl.com/3udm3547

#### **AWARDS**

### **Funding News**

Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar was awarded a HRB Trials Methodology Research Network Working Group (Funding Call 2021) to conduct the project: Using Behavioural Science to Enhance Uptake of Core Outcome Sets in Trials. The purpose of this funding is to support excellent trials methodology research and to foster research collaboration. Karen will work with a team of Irish, UK and American-based researchers from HRB Trial Methodology Research Network and the MRC-NIHR-Trial Methodology Research Partnership.



Dr Frances Shiely was recently awarded a HRB TMRN Working Group award to provide guidance on the ethical issues in SWATs (Studies within a Trial). She was also successful in the ERASMUS+KA 220-HED-Cooperation partnerships in higher education grant-Curriculum Development for Human Clinical Trials for the Next Generation of PhD Students and Early Career Researchers in the Medical, Science, Pharmacy and Health Professions (CONSCIOUS II) which will run until November 2024. UCC will work together with partners Masaryk University, Czech Republic, University of Pécs, Hungary, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal, and Universite de Paris, France.



## BSc Public Health Sciences students on the move again!

Since 2017, 3rd Year BSc Public Health Sciences students have been able to avail of a 'study abroad' option at a university outside Ireland. To facilitate this, we entered into an Erasmus exchange agreement with the BSc in European Public Health in the University of Maastricht (UM), the Netherlands. In each of the last 5

travel. However this year, four of our 3rd Years have availed of an international study experience! Ciara Hegarty, Aideen Kearns and James Scanlan are completing their semester in UM and I had the opportunity to visit them in Maastricht last November. I was impressed by how successfully they had adapted to UM's problem based learning style of teaching which is very different to what they are used to. Furthermore, they have embraced the many social and cultural opportunities on offer-despite COVID-19. Jill McCarthy has travelled across the Atlantic to West Virginia University, USA. She started her studies at the beginning of January 2022 and so far so good. She is engaging successfully with the different academic obligations and taking advantage of extra-curricular activities on offer to international students. This is a 'first' for the BSc programme as we have not had a student studying in the USA before. Jill is

our trailblazer and we look forward to her updates and

years some of our students have studied in Maastricht –with the exception of last year due to COVID-19 preventing



Students Ciara Hegarty, Aideen Kearns and James Scanlan in Maastricht

photographs! For all four students, their international experience will undoubtedly serve them well in the future. I want to compliment all four for taking on the challenge of studying abroad in still somewhat 'difficult times' globally. They are true student ambassadors for the School of Public Health in UCC!

Dr Fiona MacLeod

## Congratulations!

Congratulations to Sukainah Al Khalaf, who won the 'Investigator Award' for best-submitted abstract from the 7th SSNT (Saudi Society of Nephrology & Transplantation) Congress. Her work included a systematic review and meta-analysis of chronic kidney disease and adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Sukainah is currently a PhD student at the School of Public Health. Her PhD will focus on the impact of chronic hypertension on adverse perinatal outcomes and risk of cardiovascular disease in later life; her supervisory team includes Dr Ali Khashan, Dr Fergus McCarthy and Dr Elis O'Reilly.

Saudi Society of Nephrology & Transplantation
7th SSN Congress (Virtual)
18,19 & 20 November 2021

#### **MEET**

#### Sinéad Creedon



Sinéad Creedon joined the School of Public Health in November 2021 as a lecturer. Sinéad is coordinator for Infection Prevention & Control modules and also coordinates the Global & Environment Health Module. She has a background in nursing, law and applied psychology. She has extensive clinical experience in Infection Prevention & Control Leadership and Infectious Diseases & Tropical Medicine. She also has experience in chronic disease management and spent 5 years working for a large multinational company in Cork managing their European medical centre. More recently, Sinéad worked as a clinical nurse specialist for the HSE in Infection Prevention & Control. Sinéad is also an accredited psychological coach and specialises in coaching frontline workers and leaders. Her research interests are global pandemics and outbreak management; positive organisational

leadership and behaviour; resilience and coping in frontline staff.

- · Sinéad enjoys spending time with family and friends and socialising
- · Loves being outside in summertime near the sea and in nature
- · Costal sailing, badminton, kayaking
- Genealogy & the science of intergenerational resilience
- · Tech, gadgets, applications & software
- · Favorite books: Sapiens and Watership Down
- Favourite TV shows (too many): The Walking Dead, G.O.T, Vikings, Breaking Bad, Sorjonen: Muraalimurhat and Handmaids Tale
- Favourite movies (apart from anything StarWars or Sci-Fi): 28 Days Later and World War Z

## **Announcing the New NSRF Website**



On 3rd November 2021, the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) launched a new website. Find out more about the NSRF's remit, research projects, publications and activities here: <a href="http://nsrf.ie">http://nsrf.ie</a>. In 2020, to improve cohesion, the NSRF implemented strategic research clusters addressing specific topics, combining specialist expertise and optimising research capacity. The website is designed around these themes.

#### We extend a Warm Welcome to Ellen

Welcome to BSc Public Health Sciences graduate Ellen Murphy, who has begun a PhD in Trial Methodology. Her thesis is focused on communication of retention strategies in clinical trials. Ellen is supervised by Dr Frances Shiely and Dr Katie Gilles, University of Aberdeen. She is funded by the HRB TMRN.



#### **RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

- Al Khalaf S, Bodunde E, Maher GM, O'Reilly ÉJ, McCarthy FP, O'Shaughnessy MM, O'Neill SM, Khashan AS (2021) Chronic kidney disease and adverse pregnancy outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Am J Obstet Gynecol*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2021.10.037.
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#### **UPCOMING**

## Delighted to announce our 2022 Seminar Series kicks off on Tuesday 8th February!

The School invites you to attend our February
Seminar, "Mental Health and the Covid-19
Pandemic —A Global and National Perspective".
Presented by Professor Ella Arensman

Tuesday 8th February 1PM - 2PM Venue: ZOOM

#### Please register on Google Forms here.

Google Forms will close for registration at 17:00 Monday 7th February.

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