<u>COMHRÁ</u> - a **C**ork **M**edical **H**umanities **R**esearch and teaching **A**lliance

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On January 22nd 2024, a joint initiative by the Radical Humanities Laboratory, Future Medicines, and Future Ageing and Brain Science, explored the possibility of establishing a Medical Humanities Network at UCC.

The initiative was founded on the idea that the medical humanities is an important, growing area of research; that it is of interest to several major international research funders; that it is already part of the research area of many UCC colleagues; and that it represents a key opportunity for enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration at UCC, while also pooling resources and expertise across the Futures initiatives.

Following a call for participation, 40 UCC colleagues attended an open dialogue on the opportunities and challenges of establishing a medical humanities network at UCC. Departments/Schools/units represented included Public Health, Pharmacy, Sociology and Criminology, Speech and Hearing Sciences, Medicine and Health, Anatomy and Neuroscience, Business and Law, English and Digital Humanities, Education, Clinical Therapies, Applied Psychology, Modern Irish, Geography, Law, French, UCC Library, the Tyndall Institute, and OVPRI.

After a discussion of what we mean by medical humanities (broadly: an interdisciplinary area of research and teaching that situates human health and illness within the social, experiential, ethical, cultural, and political contexts in which they take shape) attendees were divided into groups and asked to address one of four questions:

1. What would we like a medical humanities network at UCC to do, and what would we find useful?
2. What resources, knowledge, and opportunities are already in place for a medical network at UCC, in terms of funding, training, people, opportunities to connect?
3. What are the specific strengths & opportunities for the future of medical humanities at UCC. What could we do that no one else is doing?
4. What would be a good next step??

To question 1 (what can a network do?), along with a **mailing list** and a Teams group, it was suggested that we initially host a series of joint interdisciplinary **seminars** and workshops, for people to familiarize themselves with what others are doing, along with a **directory** of in-house expertise on medical humanities topics. Colleagues emphasized the need for more **joint teaching** on medical humanities topics, especially for future health professionals, and in general the need for greater involvement of **students**, who are often attracted to interdisciplinary work. A network might additionally **map** medical-humanities-adjacent work already underway at UCC and seek to explicitly integrate medical humanities within it. The need for internal seed **funding** for brainstorming as well as a larger session on gaining medical humanities funding externally were emphasized (Wellcome Trust, Horizon, ERC, IRC etc.). It was suggested that a network could broker **linkages with the HSE and clinical communities** for humanities colleagues particularly; a network could be a source of joined-up links with charities and NGOs.

On question 2 (what resources do we have?), colleagues pointed to the need to link with **existing, rich interdisciplinary networks at UCC** (such as Social Pathologies of Contemporary Civilization in Sociology, the Critical Voices Network in Applied Social Studies, and several thriving clusters within ISS21). It was suggested that, as a nascent medical humanities community, we could **strategize in a more organized way around**

bids to the Wellcome Trust, Marie Curie, Horizon, Research Ireland, and others. We know colleagues already have a rich record of success in securing medical humanities funding from these sources, so there is an e**xisting rich pool of knowledge**. UCC also has strong links to social work, to clinical communities and especially to **social prescribing** initiatives; there is a strong **PPI** (Patient and Public Involvement) network already in place, as well as initiatives such as the PPI IGNITE Network. A wider goal of **transferability** (of knowledge, expertise, funding) across the university was frequently emphasized.

On question 3 (what is distinctive about us?), there was significant discussion on the need for a **mapping exercise**, to get a better strategic grasp on what's already happening. We know some relevant areas of major topical expertise we are known for at UCC – **ageing, climate, disease prevention, microbiome, social studies of health, migration** – but what would a more comprehensive list look like? UCC's unique position with the new **Regional Health Authority** may also provide a distinctive local opportunity. It was suggested that we could emphasize **health inequalities**, including issues of access around language and culture, as well as intersectional questions of diversity and translation, as a specific flavour for UCC medical humanities. There was discussion of the **pharmaceutical industry** in Cork, and what that might mean for medical humanities at UCC, as well as a suggestion that **public engagement** could be an additional point of emphasis.

In terms of next steps; it was generally agreed that there was need for some kind of sharing event, whether in the style of 'matchmaking' or 'lightning talks' - but a space to quickly establish the breadth of existing medical humanities topics underway at UCC, or topics that people would like to get underway, and the plans or ideas they have for doing so.

Action: agreed to organize an interdisciplinary sharing event to formally launch COMHRÁ before the summer.