

Emergency

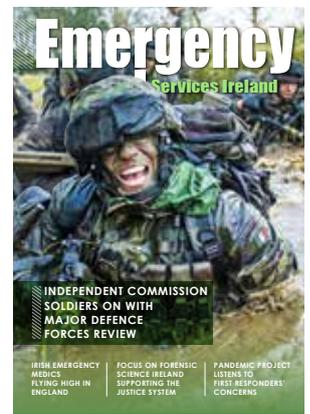
Services Ireland

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION
SOLDIERS ON WITH
MAJOR DEFENCE
FORCES REVIEW

IRISH EMERGENCY
MEDICS
FLYING HIGH IN
ENGLAND

FOCUS ON FORENSIC
SCIENCE IRELAND
SUPPORTING THE
JUSTICE SYSTEM

PANDEMIC PROJECT
LISTENS TO
FIRST RESPONDERS'
CONCERNS



ISSUE 65

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Tasked with undertaking a comprehensive review of the Defence Forces before the end of this year, the next few months will certainly tell the tale if the Commission can fully address and help to remedy the issue of army structures, falling personnel numbers, the need to re-equip and the long-awaited improvement on pay and conditions.

21 FORENSIC SCIENCE IRELAND



The next three years will be a time of significant change for Forensic Science Ireland (FSI), and Chris Enright, FSI Director General, says that they are firmly focused on providing the Irish justice system with a high quality integrated forensic service through independent, expert scientific analysis and advice to best international standards.

28 HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A new €2m state-of-the-art Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinic has opened its doors in Limerick, as part of a total investment of €5m across five Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinics nationwide, to provide a consultant-led alternative to A&E departments in hospitals when it comes to urgent care for minor injuries and illnesses.

31 FEMALES AT THE FRONTLINE

An all-island group of women who work in areas such as medicine, healthcare, psychology, law, academia, and advocacy, claims that women on the frontline can no longer take the strain of dealing with the pandemic, and the group has cited the need for increased staffing and efforts to detect Covid clusters.

32 AIR AMBULANCE



The opportunity to gain experience in pre-hospital emergency medicine as flight doctors with charity air ambulances in England, was the main reason for two Irish medics to move across the water. Talking about their respective journeys to date, they both highlight the need for similar structures to be set up by helicopter emergency medical services in this country.

40 CORK AIRPORT POLICE AND FIRE SERVICE



Following the outbreak of Covid-19, Cork Airport reviewed its emergency plans to consider the emerging threat of the virus, moving rapidly to work with the public health authorities, according to Ken Roberts, Chief Fire Officer, who outlines the protocols they have put in place to deal with this pandemic.

49 FIRE SERVICE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

A new €61 million Fire Service Capital Programme (2021-2025) will see six new fire stations built, continued support for the construction of a further 12 new fire stations, nine fire station refurbishments, in addition to the allocation of 35 new fire engines.

50 DCU COVID RESEARCH



A new report from Dublin City University, on the experiences of pre-hospital first responders during the Covid-19 pandemic, found that contracting the virus and passing it to loved ones was a primary source of worry for them, while a lack of facilities and the equipment needed for protection and sanitisation was also found to cause distress.

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52 COMMUNITY RESCUE BOATS



Operating on our coasts and major inland waterways, a wide network of community-based rescue boats has resulted in a major reduction in the number of drowning tragedies on Ireland's waters. We take a look at the work of some of these voluntary organisations around the country in providing invaluable assistance to the frontline emergency services.

59 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

There has been a great response to a new free mental health service to support people working at the frontline during Covid-19. The initiative has been provided by turn2me – the first organisation in Ireland to provide professional mental health support services entirely online, with funding from Sláintecare.

61 CRITICAL HEALTHCARE

Critical Healthcare, Ireland's leading provider of specialist frontline medical and healthcare products to emergency services both at home and abroad, has renewed its contract with the HSE National Ambulance Service (worth up to €15m) for a further three-year period.

63 CPR TRAINING

A young doctor is urging people to learn CPR after saving her father's life when he suffered a cardiac arrest while they were out cycling. Dr Caoimhe Costigan made her call during the Irish Heart



Foundation's annual 'Restart a Heart Day' awareness campaign – a two-week online initiative, which took place instead of the usual live classes for the public due to Covid-19 restrictions.

67 AMBULANCE SERVICE



As advanced paramedic Kieran Henry retires from the HSE National Ambulance Service, he recalls the highs and lows of a 30-year career, responding to emergency call-outs throughout Ireland. Stepping down as Operations Resource Manager in his native Cork, he says it's time to move on and looks forward to the next chapter of his life.

71 HYPERBARIC OXYGEN THERAPY

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy is a medical treatment that biologically repairs and regenerates human tissue by increasing tissue oxygen levels to produce long-term therapeutic benefits for a variety of conditions.

73 EMERGENCY SERVICES SHOW

Transformational change in the emergency services, driven by challenges presented by Covid-19 and the fast pace of technical innovation rolled out to the sector, is set to be a major theme of The Emergency Services Show, which is set to return to Birmingham's NEC on 7 and 8 September.

75 UK FIRE SERVICE

UK fire and rescue service employers have unilaterally scrapped a ground-breaking agreement with the Fire Brigades Union, which had enabled firefighters to assist the NHS and care sector response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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85 INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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COMMUNITY FIRST RESPONDERS CONFERENCE SET FOR SEPTEMBER



THE NATIONAL
FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK

Due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, CFR Ireland has rescheduled the 'live' Respond 2021 Conference and Exhibition for community first responder groups to Saturday 11 September. The venue will again be the Mullingar Park Hotel, and check on CFR Ireland Facebook Page over the coming months for updates www.facebook.com/CFRIreland.

NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR DUBLIN LORD MAYOR'S AWARD FOR THE EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Annual Lord Mayor's Awards are taking place until April to honour and thank those who have worked tirelessly on the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The closing date to nominate is Tuesday 16 March, and the winner will be decided by Lord Mayor Hazel Chu who will present them with a piece of specially-commissioned sculpture and a gift voucher worth €1,000.

"This is a chance for people in Dublin to thank someone. She has made a real difference in their lives during the pandemic. Hopefully before summer we will be able to bring all the monthly winners together for a reception in the Mansion House to thank them on behalf of the city," noted the Lord Mayor.



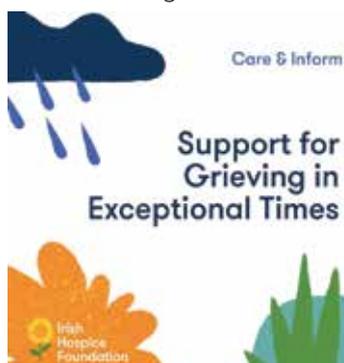
You can nominate online at: www.dublincity.ie/lordmayorsawards.

HOSPICE PROVIDES 'SUPPORT FOR GRIEVING IN EXCEPTIONAL TIMES'

The Irish Hospice Foundation has launched a free bereavement resource pack – 'Support for Grieving in Exceptional Times' – to help those living with loss during COVID-19 restrictions.

It includes all the resources developed as part of IHF's Care & Inform Hub which was specially created to respond to the needs of those facing dying, death and bereavement during the pandemic restrictions.

'Support for Grieving in Exceptional Times' includes advice and guidance on acknowledging and coping with grief from a COVID-19 death, what to expect when planning a funeral as well as helping children deal with loss and grief.



Orla Keegan, IHF's Head of Education and Bereavement Services, said: "The pandemic restrictions make everything seem strange, with

'Support for Grieving in Exceptional Times' is available to download for free from www.hospicefoundation.ie

normal routines disrupted. This is especially the case for people bereaved during this time, who find themselves planning a funeral and trying to cope with the loss of an important person in their life. Our hope for this pack is to provide information and assurance for people who are bereaved and some insights for those who want to help them."

The pack also includes resources for those supporting bereaved children as the response to the pandemic continues, helping children and supporting teenagers to grieve during COVID-19, and finding new ways for children to say goodbye.

These resources have been developed with IHF's Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN). Maura Keating, ICBN co-ordinator, said: "It's natural to want to protect and shield children when someone dies. The best thing is give them honest, age-appropriate information about death. Children cope better with sad news when they are told the truth. These resources are centred around adapting and developing new ways to support children and each other grieve until the crisis passes."

IHF also runs Ireland's only national Bereavement Support Line. This freephone service – **1800 80 70 77** – is available Monday to Friday (10am-1pm) for anyone experiencing grief and loss.

CRITICAL HEALTHCARE AND ROCHE TO DEVELOP NEW RAPID COVID-19 TEST

Critical Healthcare, the specialist provider of frontline medical and healthcare products to the global emergency services, has partnered with Roche Pharmaceutical to develop a new rapid Covid-19 test that will give the user a result in under 15 minutes.

This new Roche Covid-19 test kit does not replace the need for contact tracing but allows industry and commercial organisations to do rapid testing of staff to ensure a safe place to work. While there are some Rapid Covid tests on the market, the Roche test has a sensitivity level of over 96% and a specificity level of 99% differentiating it from others.

Critical Healthcare has worked with Roche for over seven years in developing and creating awareness for some of their products in the Irish and UK prehospital and ambulance markets. As one of the leading global suppliers in Covid detection, when Roche was looking for a partner to supply their Rapid Covid test kits, Critical Healthcare's long-standing experience in providing the global emergency medical services sector with healthcare products made them a logical partner.

Seamus Reilly, MD of Critical Healthcare said: "To date, we have received orders and enquiries from most sectors including the film industries, GP centres testing their staff, nursing homes for their staff and patients, meat and dairy industry along with many traditional companies who need to keep staff working."

Marking its 20th anniversary this year, the company



provides healthcare professionals with the essential medical products required to diagnose, resuscitate and rehabilitate patients.

Critical Healthcare works with emergency service providers, armed forces and local authorities in Ireland, UK, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, France, Spain and Poland. The company is also a key government supplier of the PPE and infection control items that have now become common-place in a 'Covid-aware' world. (10am-1pm) for anyone experiencing grief and loss.

HEALTH RESEARCH BOARD STRATEGY AIMS TO MAKE AN IMPACT OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

The Health Research Board's new strategy 'Health Research – Making an Impact' sets out a clear direction for health and social care research over the next five years, taking into account the fact that people and patients must be central to the research process.



Over the next five years, the HRB will invest in high-quality health and social care research that has real value and impact, according to Dr Mairéad O'Driscoll, CEO.

"The pandemic has highlighted that while our health system depends on the economy, without a well-functioning health and research system, economies can quickly grind to a halt," noted Dr Mairéad O'Driscoll, Chief Executive at the HRB,

"We must consider health research a long-term investment to tackle health challenges and to prevent illness and improve people's care," she added.

'Health Research – Making an Impact' will focus on the following:

- Supporting research that makes a difference for people's health, society and economy.
- Harnessing data in a regulated way to transform how healthcare is delivered and how to manage our own health.
- An independent voice to provide high-quality evidence that informs policy and practice.

- A thriving research environment; supporting research careers, ensuring highest standards of governance and ethics, and developing shared infrastructures such as clinical trials and biobanks.
- Building productive international partnerships to tackle global health and societal challenges like pandemics.

The Health Research Board strategy also outlined the importance of international research partnerships.

"The HRB is committed to fostering and enhancing European and international co-ordination, collaboration and engagement in health research, as well as providing continuous support to the Irish health research community to compete in EU funding programmes," she noted.

INCREASED DEMAND FOR COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Family Resource Centres are responding to a significant increase in demand for mental health supports during Covid-19, according to a survey on staff and volunteers, conducted by the National FRC Mental Health Promotion Project.

Shauna Diamond, National Programme Manager of the FRC Mental Health Promotion Project, said: "The pandemic has led to the loss of loved ones, economic hardship and feelings of increased isolation. Family Resource Centres across the country have collectively felt a huge increase in the demand for mental health supports."

Key findings of the online survey, carried out in December 2020:

- 94 per cent of respondents reported an increase in demand for mental health supports.
- The main reason for seeking support was due to feeling isolated, and anxiety about mental health.
- 99 per cent of staff and volunteers who completed the survey felt that Covid-19 has had a negative effect on the wellbeing of service users.
- 34 per cent of staff and volunteers who completed the survey have used the Suicide Prevention Code of Practice within the last 12 months for supporting service users.

"However, staff and volunteers at the centres have provided much-needed mental health supports to their communities during Covid-19. They have developed innovative solutions to maintain service delivery by organising counselling sessions online, outdoor support and care packages for families and older members of the community," Diamond noted.



SMART TABLET IS LIFELINE FOR OLDER PEOPLE DURING LOCKDOWN

An Irish company has created the first age-friendly smart tablet, to provide a 'lifeline' to older newcomers to technology, particularly during the lockdown period.

ACORN was created to make online communications more accessible and beneficial for new users of digital technology, particularly older people. The tablet is easy to navigate and uses clear, uncluttered displays to make online access simple and rewarding for even the most inexperienced user.

In development since 2016 and first launched to the Irish market in 2019, extensive trials during a pilot study had shown how the ACORN tablet could play a key role in supporting the engagement of older people with services, the local community and society, noted Philip

Hogan, CEO and creator of ACORN.

"Our design and production team spent four years developing this tablet, trouble shooting and creating ways to make it easier for older users to navigate the display, ensuring they get the most out of every feature.

"Covid-19 provided us with the ultimate testing ground for the tablet's efficacy and importance. It really has become a lifeline for so many over the past six months, boosted also by our phone support team which gives additional comfort to users."

ACORN'S features include clear colour-coding, larger fonts and non-technical language. It also has its own dedicated help section with over 30 tutorial videos, allowing users to familiarise themselves with the tablet's features and learn at their own speed as well as dedicated support for users.

There's a simple-to-use video calling feature which has proven invaluable to older people. ACORN supports an integrated mobile data SIM, enabling access to the internet while on the go.

Used by community groups across the country the ACORN also has a management portal to help administer support for users in communities, adding local events and information as well as making sure users are properly online.

For further information visit www.myacorn.ie



'CALCUTTA RUN' RAISES €285,000 FOR HOMELESS CHARITIES

The Law Society of Ireland presented €285,000 to its 'Calcutta Run' charity partners – Peter McVerry Trust and the Hope Foundation – at an online cheque handover ceremony last December.

The 22nd annual 'Calcutta Run' took place virtually for the first time between 30 October and 8 November 2020. Over 1,000 legal professionals, their family and friends ran, walked, cycled and hiked to collectively reach 10,000km – the distance between Dublin and Kolkata.

The President of the Law Society, James Cahill, said that once again the solicitors' profession had shown dedication in support of the Calcutta Run, reaching 10,000km and even surpassing the fundraising target by 50 per cent.

"The generosity and enthusiasm of the solicitors' profession will ensure our charity partners can support a number of their ongoing essential projects into 2021."

Founder and Director of the Hope Foundation, Maureen Forrest said that the Calcutta Run helps her charity to care for the children in Kolkata. "It directly supports our Hive Emergency Response Unit, the Bhorukha Snehneer Home, Kasba Girls' Home and our Hope Hospital."

Pat Doyle, CEO of Peter McVerry Trust said that the Calcutta Run is the homeless charity's longest running

external partnership. "We appreciate the difficult challenges this past year has brought, but with the Calcutta Run's support we are able to provide new homes across Ireland giving people and families a key to their own door."



Pat Doyle, CEO of Peter McVerry Trust, said that the Calcutta Run is the homeless charity's longest running external partnership.

MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAMS RESPOND TO "NEEDLESS CALL-OUTS"

Mountain rescue teams responded to 345 call-outs across the country during 2020, according to the latest statistics released by Mountain Rescue Ireland.



However, the representative body for the 11 mountain rescue teams on the island of Ireland noted that some teams were put under enormous pressure, due to what it described as the "needless call-outs", during the cold weather snap earlier this year.

"Some of these call-outs were absolutely needless – with people putting themselves and the voluntary mountain rescue personnel in danger. Heading out on a mountain trek in bad weather, being ill-equipped and untrained for some of the conditions is not a wise decision to make," according to Mountain Rescue Ireland.

The call-out numbers showed a slight increase over 2019, when there were 330 total incidents during the 12-month period. And those numbers for 2020 also peaked alongside lockdown changes across the country.

"Our colleagues in Mountaineering Ireland have also expressed concern with the latest number of call-outs, and offer great advice with three simple questions which people should consider before heading out – *Do I have the right gear? Do I know what the weather will be like? Am I confident I have the knowledge and skills for the day?*"

The primary advice from Mountain Rescue Ireland is to adhere to all government guidelines, and always to consider these questions before heading out on a mountain trek.

MONTHLY MEDICAL CLINIC FOR HOMELESS ARMY VETERANS

A monthly medical clinic, conducted by Dr Cathal Berry TD, has been established in Brú na bhFiann, the largest hostel operated by ONE (Organisation of National Ex-Service Personnel) for homeless veterans.

Dr Berry, who is now a TD representing Kildare South in Dáil Éireann, is a veteran of the Irish Defence Forces. He served in the elite Army Ranger Wing before qualifying as a medical doctor and becoming the head of the Military Medical School in the Defence Forces Training Centre at the Curragh Camp. He deployed overseas five times, with NATO in Kosovo, the EU in Chad and the UN in the Middle East (Lebanon).

The clinic, which opened in October 2020, is proving to be a great success, and Cathal now aims to bring a second volunteer doctor to the clinic.



Dr Cathal Berry TD, who represents Kildare South in Dáil Éireann, is a veteran of the Defence Forces.

ONE is currently looking for Veteran Medical Officers who wish to provide a similar service in their homes in Athlone and Letterkenny and, going forward, in their planned hostels in Cobh (currently under construction) and in Cork City.

Members of ARCO (Association of Retired Commissioned Officers) who are interested in becoming involved should contact Ollie O'Connor, CEO of ONE, at 087-2336643. For further details visit www.one-veterans.org

HEALTH PASSPORT EUROPE PROVIDES DIGITAL PLATFORM FOR VACCINE INFORMATION

Irish nursing home staff have become among the first in Europe to use Health Passport Europe mobile technology to support vaccinations.

CareChoice Nursing Home Group staff are set to receive their COVID-19 vaccination status on the Irish-engineered Health Passport Europe digital platform, which allows people to securely store and display their COVID-19 vaccine status, along with COVID-19 test results and travel certifications.

The Dungarvan Nursing Home was amongst the first nursing homes in Ireland to deploy vaccinations for their staff in January.

The digital platform has been developed to support the official COVID-19 vaccination status and includes a specific status based on whether the user has received one or two doses of the Pfizer vaccination. CareChoice facilities have already successfully used Health Passport Europe to support rapid COVID-19 testing for staff since October 2020.



"The Health Passport Europe digital platform has a key role to play in supporting vaccinations and testing. Tens of thousands of people are already using the seamless technology in Ireland and abroad for presenting their COVID-19 test status.

"The platform is set to support the reopening of many industries including travel, tourism, events, sports, and business," said Robert Quirke, founder of Health Passport Europe.

"Our secure system has been engineered to safely house test results, vaccination certificates, and travel documents which are immediately and securely available within the person's app, with the details updated and administered to the platform by healthcare professionals. As we progress in overcoming the pandemic, having an efficient and secure system will be essential to support the reopening of our economy," noted Quirke.

Gerry Moore, CEO of CareChoice Group said, "We have been using the platform as part of our COVID screening programme and it has provided great assurance to our staff, their families and residents."

The Health Passport Europe mobile technology is in use at testing facilities including V1 Medical, Cara Pharmacy, Murray's Pharmacy, Medel Healthcare, Life Pharmacy, Gallery Quay Pharmacy, SureHealth, RocDoc, Union Quay Medical Centre, CarePlus, MyCorkGP and many more where customers can receive their test results and documentation straight to their app without delay.



COMMISSION TARGETS MAJOR ONGOING ISSUES FOR DEFENCE FORCES

Tasked with undertaking a comprehensive review of the Defence Forces before the end of this year, the next few months will certainly tell the tale if the Commission can fully address and help to remedy the issue of army structures, falling personnel numbers, the need to re-equip and the long-awaited improvement on pay and conditions. Report by Deirdre O'Flynn.

The independent Commission on the Defence Forces, which comprises 15 members with national and international high-level expertise and experience, has been tasked with undertaking a comprehensive review, and to report its recommendations to the Minister for Defence, Simon Coveney TD, by the end of this year.

According to its Terms of Reference, the Commission will have

regard to immediate requirements whilst also seeking to develop a vision for beyond 2030. Informed by both the White Paper on Defence 2015 and the White Paper on Defence Update 2019, the Commission will take account of Ireland's defence requirements, including its overseas commitments and the security role of the Defence Forces here in Ireland.

It will consider and recommend the appropriate structure and size of

the Permanent Defence Force (PDF) and the Reserve Defence Force (RDF). This will encompass consideration of appropriate capabilities, army structures and staffing, the brigade structure, the Air Corps, and the Naval Service along with the appropriate balance and disposition of personnel and structures across a joint force approach in the land, air, maritime, cyber, intelligence and space domains.

With regard to the Reserve Defence Force, the Commission will make a raft of recommendations to better leverage the capabilities of the RDF in their supports to the PDF and to make service in the RDF a more attractive option.

Other areas of review include governance and effective high-level command and control structures in the Defence Forces; remuneration



"There has been a very positive response to date to our public consultation process," according to Aidan O'Driscoll, Chair of the Commission, and he encourages those with views on the Defence Forces to make a submission before the closing date of Friday 19 March.

systems and structures in the context of a future Permanent Pay Review Body; human resources policies, recruitment, turnover and retention approaches.

AGILE, FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTIVE

The ultimate aim, according to Minister Coveney, is to ensure a Defence Forces that is agile, flexible, and adaptive in responding to changes in the security environment, including new and emerging threats and technologies.

As of mid-February, the Commission has met on four occasions, according to its Chairperson, Aidan O'Driscoll. In his statement to 'Emergency Services Ireland', he said that it was very clear from the engagement to date the very considerable, and important, body of work facing the Commission.

"However, I'm delighted with the progress we have made in a relatively short period of time. To date, we've met with a range of key stakeholders, including the three Defence Forces Representative Associations – PDFORRA, RACO and RDFRA.

"Due to COVID restrictions, I very much regret that it has not been possible to commence a planned series of visits to various military installations around the country, but members of the Defence Forces (both Permanent and Reserve) can rest assured that I am determined that these will get underway in some form

as soon as it is safe to do so."

Alongside these meetings, the Commission also started a public consultation in January that will run until mid-March, to seek submissions on Defence Forces' capabilities, structures, staffing and any other comments, with regard to the Terms of Reference.

"There has been a very positive response to date to our public consultation process," said O'Driscoll, and he encourages anyone with views on the Defence Forces to consider making a submission, before the deadline on Friday 19 March (see for details www.gov.ie/codf).

PERMANENT DEFENCE FORCES

According to Gerard Guinan, General Secretary of PDFORRA, the association representing soldiers, sailors and aircrew of the Permanent Defence Forces, "the Association is bitterly disappointed at the lack of representation of enlisted personnel on the Commission. All in all, there are four former officers, including the last Chief of Staff, and a number of former reserve officers".

He was critical of the fact that the Commission does not have scope to make recommendations around pay rates, which he said "will come as a surprise to many, especially when it is central to the difficulties being experienced by the organisation".

The issue of pay rates and allowances continues to be a point of contention amongst enlisted personnel, despite the recommendations of the Public Service Pay Commission in 2019. "This is evidenced by a significant number of discharges in 2019 and 2020."

The issue of a potential permanent pay review body is also of concern to PDFORRA. "Our Association has considered the operation and results from the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB), which operates to set rates of pay in the British Armed Forces. The results speak for themselves.

"Recent reports from the AFPRB show considerable dissatisfaction levels amongst enlisted personnel and high levels of voluntary outflow. Therefore, PDFORRA believes that the granting of associate membership to ICTU is a fundamental and human right that must be acceded to in the short term."

Aside from the issue of pay, Guinan acknowledged that other



"The Association is bitterly disappointed at the lack of representation of enlisted personnel on the Commission" – Gerard Guinan, PDFORRA General Secretary



This Commission is a final opportunity to address the issues that have brought the Defence Forces to the point whereby the “slow decline through neglect and bad policy for almost a decade” is becoming irreversible, according to Comdt. Conor King, General Secretary of the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (RACO).

issues requiring scrutiny, such as contracts, career progression and grievance procedures, fall within the scope of the Commission’s remit.

COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

This Commission is “a once-in-a-generation and, perhaps, final opportunity” to address the issues that have brought the Defence Forces to the point whereby the “slow decline through neglect and bad policy for almost a decade” is becoming irreversible, according to Comdt. Conor King, General Secretary of the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (RACO).

“Numerous reviews and commissions have skirted around the root cause of

THE NUMBERS GAME

According to Gerard Guinan, PDFORRA General Secretary, the current membership of the Defence Forces stands at approximately 8,500, if lag times for recruitment and discharges are taken into consideration. “This is approximately 1,000 personnel below establishment levels, with the primary shortfall amongst the enlisted ranks,” he said.

“Given the lean nature of the Defence Forces’ since its reorganisation in 2012, deficiencies like these inhibit certain operational commitments, such as putting ships to sea,” he added.

However, while officer numbers appear healthy, according to Comdt. Conor King, RACO Secretary General, “this is due to unprecedented numbers of new entrants over the last few years. We have replaced experience with raw cadets, and this has implications for supervision and mentoring, not to mention risk and governance.

“Worryingly, 30% of the officer body has less than five years’ service. There are currently 42% of army captains unavailable for operational taskings in Ireland, due to vacancies, overseas service, and long-term training courses.

“The situation is just as difficult in the Naval Service and Air Corps, particularly in the specialist and technician streams. Air Corps pilot numbers have recently improved due to a recommissioning/re-entry scheme, but it is unclear how many will remain in service once the aviation industry recovers post-COVID-19.

“There are 620 unfilled Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) vacancies throughout the organisation. This has a profound impact on mentoring, supervision, and governance, and increases organisational risk.”



In relation to the RDF, only about 1,500 personnel remain operationally effective out of “an established size of just over 4,000 for both Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve”, said Eugene Gargan, RFDR President.

“A combination of natural wastage, recruitment difficulties and the challenge of retaining trained personnel has all taken their toll.” Indeed, shortages of personnel in key administrative and training appointments further compound the challenges in dealing with recruitment and training, he said, adding that “the effect of an almost complete shutdown of Reserve activities during the pandemic will doubtlessly further erode our numbers”.



The Commission is “possibly the last opportunity we will have to contribute to a reshaping of long-term government defence policy”, according to Eugene Gargan, President of the Reserve Defence Forces Representative Association (RDFRA).

this decline, without actually addressing it – the failure to adequately resource defence in order to retain highly qualified and experienced personnel to maintain capability,” he added.

According to RACO, the Commission must look at where the Defence Forces fit into facing the threats posed to the State and what resources are required to execute its mission. “It must recommend a better structure for the governance and command of the Defence Forces, with more control over budget given to the Chief of Staff, and an appropriate overseas and training establishment to take the pressure off units,” said King.

Retention, remuneration, and pensions should also be addressed, according to RACO. “The Commission is mandated to implement a permanent pay review body which recognises the unique nature of military service. Like our other uniformed colleagues in An Garda Síochána, Defence Forces personnel face restrictions unlike any other group, which have been exploited, rather than rewarded or compensated for.

“Our members forego the right to trade union membership and its associated right to strike. They willingly submit themselves to abide by Military Law. They are required to achieve strict annual medical and fitness standards and are liable to be posted away from family for

extended periods of time.

“They also bear an Unlimited Liability in their service to the State, ultimately willingly volunteering to place themselves in harm’s way. Unfortunately, this loyalty and commitment to serve has attracted much praise but little else from successive governments,” Comdt Conor King noted.

RESERVE DEFENCE FORCES

The Reserve Defence Forces Representative Association (RDFRA), which advocates on behalf of officers and other ranks of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve, welcomes the establishment of the Commission and the broad range of perspectives, experience, and

According to RACO, the Commission must look at where the Defence Forces fit into facing the threats posed to the State and what resources are required to execute its mission.



expertise of its members.

RDFRA would like the Commission to address its immediate concerns urgently, according to Eugene Gargan, RDFRA President. “At the outbreak of the pandemic, the operational state of the Reserve was in dire need of remedial actions to address critical issues with delays to recruitment and retention of experienced and trained personnel. Only when these problems are effectively addressed can consideration be given to broader strategic and long-term objectives.”

The Commission is “possibly the last opportunity we will have to contribute to a reshaping of long-term government defence policy”, he said. Gargan acknowledged that the Minister for Defence and the new Secretary General in the Department and new staff “bring with them a new and fresh approach to the complex problem of planning our military defence disposition”.

He said that they recognise the value an effective, properly resourced Reserve can provide, adding that the RDFRA expects the Commission to “propose a solution to the long-held question of our strategic purpose and, with it, the means to effectively address our other issues”.



When contacted by 'Emergency Services Ireland the Defence Forces' Chief of the Staff, Vice Admiral Mark Mellett, declined to comment until the Commission has presented its report to the Minister at the end of the year.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION ON THE DEFENCE FORCES

- Chair: Aidan O’Driscoll, former Secretary General, Department of Agriculture 2015-2018 and Department of Justice and Equality 2018-2020.
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- Admiral Haakon Bruun-Hanssen, retired Norwegian Chief of Defence (2020).
- Shay Cody, former Chair of ICTU Public Services Committee and retired Senior General Secretary of Forsa 2010-2019.
- Maura Conway, Professor of International Security, DCU School of Law and Government.
- Marie Cross, retired Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, former Ambassador to the EU Political-Security Committee (PSC).
- Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, Danish researcher and security policy expert. Member of the advisory group to the NATO Secretary General on NATO 2030.
- Dan Harvey, military historian, museum curator and retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Defence Forces.
- Caitriona Heintz, Executive Director at the Azure Forum for Contemporary Security Strategy, Ireland and Adjunct Research Fellow at the School of Politics and International Relations at UCD.
- John Minihan, former Senator and retired Captain in the Defence Forces.
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- Lieutenant General Esa Pulkkinen, Finnish Military Officer with a rank equivalent to Defence Forces Chief of Staff.
- Geraldine Tallon, former Chair of Department of Defence Audit Committee (2014-2019).
- Dr Gerry Waldron, Director of Slándáil (National Security Summit Ireland), and former Defence Forces officer.
- Jane Williams, Managing Partner, SIA Partners Management Consultants.



Coimisiún um Óglaigh na hÉireann
Commission on the Defence Forces



FOCUS ON FORENSIC SCIENCE SUPPORTING JUSTICE

The next three years will be a time of significant change for Forensic Science Ireland (FSI), and Chris Enright, FSI Director General, says that they are firmly focused on providing the Irish justice system with a high quality integrated forensic service through independent, expert scientific analysis and advice to best international standards.

Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) is an associated office of the Department of Justice and Equality. We work together to deliver, to best international standards, comprehensive scientific analysis, independent expert opinion, advice and training to support the Irish justice system.

Originally known as the Forensic Science Laboratory, FSI was established in 1975 to provide a scientific service to the Criminal Justice System by analysing samples submitted from crime scenes and providing expert evidence in criminal trials. In June 2014, President Michael D. Higgins extended our scope when he signed into law the Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Act 2014.

Under this act, FSI is named as the custodian of the DNA database and our name was changed from the Forensic Science Laboratory to Forensic Science Ireland to recognise this broader remit.

In December 2019, responsibility for the Fingerprints, Documents and Handwriting services transferred from

the Garda National Technical Bureau to Forensic Science Ireland. This consolidates most laboratory-based forensic work in the State under Forensic Science Ireland.

FSI currently has 190 staff, including seconded Garda members, scientists and analysts trained in forensic testing and reporting techniques, supported by administration professionals. FSI is accredited to the ISO17025 (2017) standard and holds a Gold Excellence Through People (ETP) certification. FSI is also a founding member of the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (ENFSI), and the Association of Forensic Service Providers (AFSP).

These organisations are focused on developing and sharing best international forensic practices and research within its members. Our staff are active on all the relevant ENFSI and AFSP working groups to ensure that expert evidence that we present is grounded in the most recent scientific research and best international practice.

FROM CRIME SCENE TO COURT

Although much of FSI's work happens in the laboratory, we play an important role through the criminal investigative and judicial process from crime scene to court. In broad terms, forensic investigations involve the examination of items recovered from crime scenes and the use of various techniques to investigate links between suspects and complainants, and between suspects and scenes.

This is underpinned by an objective evaluation of context and scientific facts, which can lead to the exoneration of suspects. This evidence is available for review by experts acting on behalf of the defence and is subject to cross-examination by defence counsel at trial. There are few major criminal trials that do not feature



Since the DNA database was launched in 2015, it has assisted in over 3,500 investigations by matching individuals to evidence recovered from crime scenes, according to Chris Enright.

some contribution from FSI.

We work on cases that range from murders, shootings, serious assaults, sexual assaults, drug seizures, burglaries, explosive finds and reported on over 16,000 cases in 2019 alone. FSI also supports the delivery of training programmes within the justice sector, including crime

scene investigation and evaluation, evidence recovery for Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATUs) and presumptive drug testing.

The analysis of materials thought to contravene the Misuse of Drugs Acts constitute the highest number of submissions to FSI and are supported by the Chemical Analysis Department. Case submissions vary widely in size, drug mix and complexity. These cases can involve new psychoactive substances that pose particular analytical challenges.

The drugs team have influenced legislation through the identification and characterisation of drugs in the marketplace. In addition to drugs submissions, debris samples from suspicious fires are analysed for accelerants (e.g. petrol), offensive sprays (such as pepper spray) are evaluated and toxicology samples associated with sexual assault cases are analysed and evaluated.

RECOVERY OF TRACE EVIDENCE

The Physical Analysis area, the most recently formed department in FSI, was set up to take advantage of the overlaps between disciplines moving from the Garda National Technical Bureau (Fingerprints, Documents and Handwriting) and disciplines already supported within FSI.

This department supports a diverse range of examinations where trace evidence recovered from scenes or suspects (such as glass, paint, fibres or firearm residue) is compared to reference samples.

Items recovered from crime scenes are examined to enhance any marks or impressions present, such as the digital capture of finger marks using various light sources, footwear or tyre impressions or manufacturing marks on plastic bags. Suspect materials are also analysed for explosives and unknown chemicals within this department.

NEW PURPOSE-BUILT FACILITY

As in other jurisdictions, the demand for forensic services has more than doubled over the past five years and is



Currently located at Garda HQ in the Phoenix Park, Forensic Science Ireland will move to Co. Kildare once construction of the new €65m forensics lab in Celbridge is complete. The new purpose-built facility is set to bring DNA analysis in line with international standards.

expected to grow even further over the next three years. FSI has developed a strategic plan that maps out how we would like to improve and grow our services over this period.

These plans are enabled by the construction of a new purpose-built FSI facility at the Backweston Science Campus in Celbridge, Co. Kildare. The design of this new facility will support the analysis and evaluation of trace evidence to the most exacting international standards, as well as providing significant additional space and capacity for submissions, case work and the introduction of new forensic services.

FSI is proud to have very capable and talented forensic practitioners, analytical staff and administrative professionals in our organisation – they are highly regarded for the services that we deliver today within the forensic networks that we co-operate with.

The additional capacity enabled by our new facility will allow us to develop and introduce new techniques that can support criminal investigations more efficiently and effectively, with a positive impact on the justice system.

MAJOR IMPACT OF DNA DATABASE

The area of most sustained growth is DNA – the discipline of greatest recent developments. In the DNA area, DNA profiles are generated from submitted items and compared with DNA profiles obtained from suspects to assist the investigation of crimes ranging from burglaries to sexual assaults and murder. Blood Pattern Analysis (BPA) and the examination of damage to clothing are also carried out.

FSI has focused on extending its intelligence services over the past five years, in addition to its well-established evidential services. The objective of these services is to provide relevant and timely information that can help An Garda Síochána and other police forces throughout

investigations.

For example, in addition to providing evidential information on specific drugs cases, FSI also provides intelligence information on drug purity and adulterants that is useful in understanding drug supply chain trends. FSI manages the National DNA Database and its use and impact have grown considerably since its launch in 2015.

Since the database was launched, it has assisted in over 3,500 investigations by matching individuals to evidence recovered from crime scenes (called crime stains) or connecting crime-stains into clusters from the same unknown individual. FSI provides two biometric services – DNA and fingerprints – that offer compelling intelligence and evidential information when comparing an individual to a stain or mark recovered from a crime scene.

INTERNATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

The international dimension of this intelligence service has grown over the past year. Since 2019, FSI is exchanging DNA profiles and fingerprint records with other European countries through the Prüm Treaty. This treaty allows for the automated anonymous comparison of profiles or records among participating countries and enables fast information exchange for intelligence purposes.

This is already having an impact – for example, two sexual assaults in Ireland were linked to an individual on the Austrian database within days of connecting the databases. In addition, fingerprint records will be exchanged soon through the Schengen Information System (SISII) – this is the most widely used and largest information sharing system for security, law enforcement and border management in Europe.

FSI has been able to grow our contribution to Missing Persons investigations due to advances made in the extraction of DNA from bones, improved DNA profiling as well as the DNA Database system and relationship



Justice Minister Helen McEntee pictured with Chris Enright, FSI Director General, at the launch of the FSI's 2019 Annual Report in September 2020. A section contained in the report on the reference index of the DNA Database shows an increase of close to 10,000 profiles and up to 1,500 crime scene samples. Significantly, 43 out of every 100 crime stain samples uploaded onto the DNA database will now be linked to a person.



In 2018, Dr Sheila Willis, then FSI Director General, said that the State's new forensic science laboratory, earmarked for Backweston in Co. Kildare, would "enable more efficient practices". (Pic: Alan Betson, Irish Times)

matching software. We maintain a database of family members (currently with over 470 profiles) that are compared with human remains discovered.

The improvements made in technology and systems, coupled with effective co-operation with the Garda Missing Persons Bureau, allowed us to identify the remains of eight missing people in 2019 and five people in 2020. FSI is very committed to advancing our technology, our systems, and processes to continuously develop this service.

BIOMETRIC INFORMATION EXCHANGE

We will expand the range of countries we exchange biometric information with and will work on maximising the investigative and intelligence potential from the combination of these services. We plan to expand our drugs intelligences services also by providing scientific and analytical insights on synthesis, manufacturing, content and distribution.

We plan to improve and develop our ICT systems, so that we are consistent with the latest international

standards for biometric databases and analysis tools.

A sustained investment in Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) over the coming years, with effective partnership and integration across the justice sector, will have a profound impact on a safe, fair and inclusive society.

'Emergency Services Ireland' would like to thank FSI Director General Chris Enright for his permission to use his article, first published in Eolas Magazine online in November 2020.

FACTFILE – CHRIS ENRIGHT, FSI DIRECTOR GENERAL

Dublin native Chris Enright joined Forensic Science Ireland in January 2018. He has spent most of his professional career in the private sector, having worked for over 21 years in a variety of technology, engineering and leadership roles in the US, Spain and Ireland.

Chris was the R&D Director for HP's Inkjet Business in Leixlip. Prior to joining HP, he worked in the pharmaceutical industry in Cork. He holds a BSc in Chemistry and Physics, in addition to Masters' Degrees in Engineering Management and Business Studies.

He holds of post-graduate diplomas in strategy, innovation, marketing and organisation development and is a Chartered Engineer within Engineers Ireland and a PMP (Project Management Professional) member.

Having succeeded Dr Sheila Willis who retired as FSI Director in 2018, his main focus is to build on the progress made in recent years towards a best-in-class forensic organisation.

**Forensic Science Ireland, Garda HQ, Phoenix Park, Dublin 8;
P: 01-6662910; E: info@fsi.gov.ie; W: <https://forensicscience.ie/>**



LAYA HEALTHCARE OPENS LATEST CLINIC IN LIMERICK

A new €2m state-of-the-art Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinic has opened its doors in Limerick, as part of a total investment of €5m across five Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinics nationwide, to provide a consultant-led alternative to A&E departments in hospitals when it comes to urgent care for minor injuries and illnesses.

Within the past year Laya Healthcare has opened the doors to its clinics in Dublin and Galway to provide consultant-led care for minor injuries and illnesses as well as a wide range of wellbeing services.

This €2m state-of-the-art health and wellbeing clinic in Limerick is the latest to open for business, with two further facilities earmarked over the next two years. The new clinic, located in Caherdavin, has also created of 20 new jobs.

Speaking on the investment, Laya Healthcare's Director of Claims and Provider Relations, John McCall, said that the need for easy-to-access and immediate treatment and care in a safe environment has never been greater.

"However, due to the current third wave of Covid -19, in order to protect the health and safety of our team and our members, walk-in urgent care treatment is currently available for minor injuries only such as sprains, insect and animal bites, fractures, minor head injuries and



Saoirse McMahon, staff nurse, and Dr Brendan Gouws, pictured at the official opening of the new €2m Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinic in Caherdavin, Limerick on 12 January.

"Over the past few months many members are now more open to digital health and wellbeing services they can access from us," according to John McCall, Laya Healthcare's Director of Claims and Provider Relations.

minor burns," he told 'Emergency Services Ireland'.

Video or face-to-face consultations are also available for minor illnesses by appointment. Video consultations can usually be booked within two hours by phone on 1890-933-030. "Over the past few months many members have now realised the breadth of digital health and wellbeing services they can



access from us and are more open to digital health offerings.

"We saw a 184% increase in our 'GPLive' service in 2020 (Jan-Dec 2020) – people are more comfortable availing of virtual health and wellbeing from the comfort of their own homes," he pointed out.

RAPID URGENT CARE DELIVERY

The network of Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinics located in Dublin, Galway and now Limerick underpins a key part of their strategy, he said, "to empower our 600,000+ members to look after their health and wellbeing proactively, and supports one of the key ambitions of the Government's Sláintecare health reform to move more non-complex care out of the acute hospital settings into community settings where appropriate".

Other health and wellbeing services such as Heartbeat Cardiac Screenings (available to members aged 12 and over) and personalised health and fitness consultations (available to members aged 16 and over) will also be available at the clinic over the coming months, exclusively available for Laya healthcare members.

"Patients will be seen within an hour of arrival and the clinics are open from 10am to 10pm, 365 days a year. Our clinics provide urgent care consultation and treatment to members and non-members, aged 12 months+ seeking treatment for minor injuries and illnesses." He said that Laya

Healthcare continues to offer frontline healthcare support for its members including 24/7 access to GPs and nurses, 24/7 access to mental wellbeing Support (depending on the scheme and level of cover).

There is also unlimited access to Laya Healthcare Concierge service and urgent care access for minor injuries and illnesses across the three Laya Health & Wellbeing Clinics in Dublin, Galway and Limerick.

"In addition to the new Laya Health and Wellbeing Clinics, depending on your level of cover, our members are covered up to €375 per visit in direct settlement to cover an 'urgent care' consultation and related treatment in the Affidea Express Care Clinics in Cork, Tallaght and Santry in Dublin."

For more information visit www.layahealthcare.ie/clinics




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'EXHAUSTED AND TRAUMATISED' GROUP SAYS WOMEN ON FRONTLINE CANNOT TAKE THE STRAIN

An all-island group of women who work in areas such as medicine, healthcare, psychology, law, academia, and advocacy, claims that women on the frontline can no longer take the strain of dealing with the pandemic. The group has cited the need for increased staffing and efforts to detect Covid clusters.

The Covid Women's Voices Group has said women working on the healthcare frontlines can no longer take the strain without proper resources and a complete rethink about how to combat the virus.

In an open letter, signed by 40 members of the group, which was published in a recent issue of the Irish Examiner (27 January 2021), the Covid Women's Voices group says women are "disproportionately bearing the burden of a pandemic that has heralded untold grief and wrought economic havoc" and that the third lockdown has illustrated "the inequalities, including structural, social and economic barriers, still faced by women".

The group claims that women working in healthcare can no longer take the strain of carrying the burden of providing essential medical services, in the absence of childcare, whilst supervising home-schooling and caring for vulnerable family members at home.

"Many of our members have had to leave the frontline, unlikely to return, owing to the near-impossible task of juggling commitments, and the emotional distress sustained on the frontline, resulting in large-scale burnout."

The group says that losing healthcare workers to burnout is an indictment of the "State's failure to recognise



Dr Sharon Lambert, UCC's School of Applied Psychology, was one of the 40 signatories of the letter published by the 'Irish Examiner' on 27 January. (Pic: Denis Minihane)

the challenges facing us, and their failure to support us in our vital roles". It notes that lockdowns have failed as a response to the virus and an alternative approach is needed.

TARGETED RESOURCES REQUIRED

"Based on our multiple fields of expertise we believe that significant, targeted resources, justified in the public interest, are required to avoid a fourth lockdown," the letter says, advocating supports such as available childcare and permission for care workers in direct provision to work.

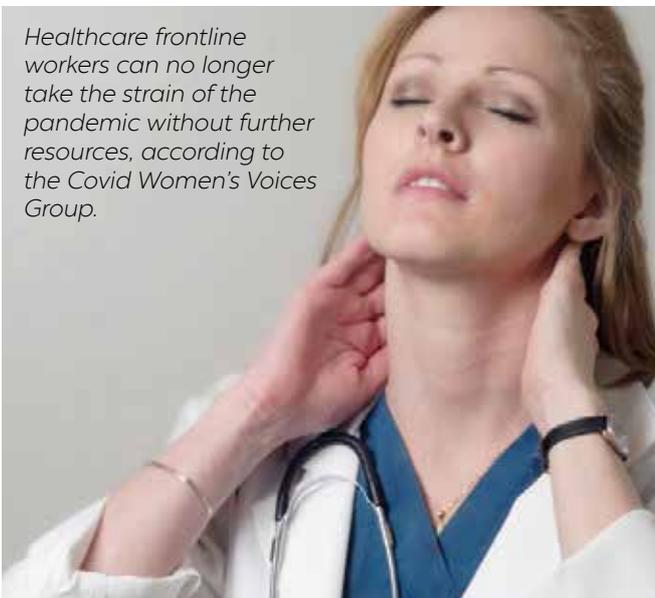
It maintains that public health investment – such as improved IT systems and increased staffing – are required to allow rapid identification and containment of indigenous clusters of Covid 19, as well as "supervision, enforcement and practical support for those, including inbound travellers who need to be quarantined, with requisite supports and supervision for close contacts".

It also says special supports for those in crowded accommodation, including members of the Traveller/ Mincéir and Roma communities and those in direct provision are needed, along with "direct engagement with vulnerable communities to provide information and support around the suppression of Covid-19".

Members of the group include Dr Gabrielle Colleran, consultant paediatric radiologist, Dr Sharon Lambert, applied psychologist, and Dr Hilary McLoughlin, consultant in respiratory and general medicine at Portiuncula Hospital.

The letter concludes: "It is inconceivable that the voices of women, who are now the majority in Ireland, are not being sufficiently heard on these critical issues. But they must be heard, because we can't do another wave. And you can't do it without us."

Healthcare frontline workers can no longer take the strain of the pandemic without further resources, according to the Covid Women's Voices Group.



IRISH EMERGENCY MEDICS FLYING HIGH IN ENGLAND

The opportunity to gain experience in pre-hospital emergency medicine as flight doctors with charity air ambulances in England, was the main reason for two Irish medics to move across the water. They spoke to Deirdre O'Flynn about their respective journeys to date, and they also highlighted the need for similar structures to be set up by helicopter emergency medical services in this country.

Dr Lisa Guthrie who was interviewed in the previous issue of 'Emergency Services Ireland' on her work with husband Bernard in the Order of Malta at the frontline of the pandemic in Ireland, recently spoke to us since moving to England to take on additional training in pre-hospital emergency medicine with the air ambulance unit in Essex and Hertfordshire.

In July 2020, she joined Essex and Hertfordshire Air Ambulance (EHAAT) in England as a flight doctor. Lisa, who hails from Ballina, Co. Mayo, was previously a specialist registrar in University Hospital Galway, and was also the Order of Malta's first female chief medical officer, since the organisation set up in Ireland in 1938.

She has certainly welcomed the new challenge, having worked in Emergency Departments around Ireland as part of her training for 10 years.

"I'm now part of the Critical Care Team giving life-saving critical care that delivers a pre-hospital emergency medical service," said Lisa. EHAAT is a charity that delivers critical care to the people of Essex, Hertfordshire, and surrounding areas – and relies on funding from the UK's National Lottery, the UK Government and donations from local people.

EHAAT has been tasked with over 25,000 missions since the charity air ambulance service was founded in 1999. Operating out of Earls Colne Airfield in Colchester, EHAAT is now developing a second airbase in North Weald (in the Epping Forest District of Essex).

CRITICAL CARE DELIVERY

Delivering critical care with EHAAT often involves attending at roadside or farmyard accidents, knife and gun crime, gas explosions, drug-related crises – both inside and outside the M25. "We provide mutual aid inside the M25 if the London critical care services need our help and, likewise, they assist us if we need it."

The nature of the incidents and the training involved in responses has been new to Lisa. "I wasn't prepared for the amount of knife and gun crime," she said, but "the medicine is the same. However, in an Emergency Department, you have the back-up of colleagues around you whereas, on the side of the road, it's just me and the paramedic doing the procedure."

Training is the key to response time, and Lisa is full of praise about the training on offer at EHAAT. "Every day at the morning briefing, we go through a standard operating



Tyrone's Eimhear Quinn, Consultant in Emergency Medicine, who is based at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust Hospital in Manchester, pictured with Mayo's Dr Lisa Guthrie, on board the Essex and Hertfordshire Air Ambulance August 2020, when their rotas overlapped.



Eimhear Quinn and Dr Lisa Guthrie pictured with some EHAAT crew members.

procedure and simulate scenarios, so you have a skillset to deal with emergencies.

"It means, for example, when I couldn't intubate someone at 5am, I had a back-up plan for it. I wasn't nervous and I was able to troubleshoot it with the paramedic. I don't feel we do that training as a standard in Ireland. It's 'ad hoc' in different places."

Every Tuesday is Case Presentation Day. "We spend six hours discussing cases from the previous week and you learn so much. On one occasion, we discussed a case where the flight doctor couldn't get intravenous access and had to go through the bone (IO) to provide medications for an RSI (emergency intubation).

"Two weeks later, I had to deal with that same situation with the same paramedic from the first incident. We did the procedure, went through the same steps and everything was fine. This definitely takes me out of my comfort zone."

BREAKING COMMUNICATIONS BARRIER

As well as learning about the team, the pilots, the paramedics, the road crew, the police, the Hazard Area Response Team (HART), Lisa is also learning about communication and being confident.

"You have to step up – yes, I can ring a consultant for oversight, but the training has expanded my confidence in decision making. I can feel myself getting more confident in my skillset."

Lisa's communication skills have also improved.

"There are different barriers to communication, not least the masks and different accents. We use a closed-loop communication, which is more definite and to the point.

"You say exactly what is happening, what I can see and what I am doing. If I don't say it, the paramedic doesn't know what's going on or vice versa. Again, that's something I think we don't do as well as we should in Irish emergency departments, in terms of closed-loop communication, relaying of information to the person beside you."

Interestingly, Lisa has had nothing but positive experiences with her Irish accent helping to break down barriers with people.

"People absolutely love the Irish accent and love hearing about Ireland." She has also bumped into other Irish people working in the emergency services in England, such as Cork-born Dr Ronan Fenton, EHAAT's Medical Director.

THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

However, it's not always easy for Irish people interested in returning home. "If you're a paramedic in the UK, that qualification isn't as easily transferred to Advanced Paramedic level in Ireland.

"There are lots of different aspects to be considered. Speaking with Irish paramedics in the UK, a lot want to come home. However, there isn't a defined pathway for integration, so they are put off from returning."

Another difference is the work-life balance. "We're definitely well trained in Ireland, but at times, you have to



As well as learning about the team, the pilots, the paramedics, the road crew, the police, the Hazard Area Response Team (HART), Lisa is also learning about communication..."

You have to step up. Yes, I can ring a consultant for oversight, but the training has expanded my confidence in decision making. I can feel myself getting more confident in my skillset.

work in excess of 70 hours a week in Ireland. In the UK, there are enough people to allow for part-time work. There's a more holistic view in the UK that work is not your life. You don't lose training or respect if you step back for a few years.

"EHAAT knew that I had children when I applied for this role and they offered to help me with schools if we were all going to move to the UK. When I started in July 2020, the rota manager messaged me here to say EHAAT would accommodate me flying home to be with my family and would facilitate me to have time off over Christmas. I've never had a job where I could talk about my family like that.

"I'd love to come back to Ireland to work as a Consultant in Emergency Medicine with an interest in PHEM. It has been a great experience to go abroad to see how another system works and to hopefully help to structure PHEM in Ireland."

FLEXIBLE WORKING ROTAS

If PHEM is restructured in Ireland, Lisa's Tyrone-born colleague Eimhear Quinn may be interested in returning home. A Consultant in Emergency



Training is the key to response time, and Lisa is full of praise for the training on offer at EHAAT. "Every day at the morning briefing, we go through a standard operating procedure and simulate scenarios, so you have a skillset to deal with emergencies."

IRISH AIR CORPS EMERGENCY AEROMEDICAL SERVICE

The Irish Air Corps, in partnership with the Irish Coast Guard, has provided an air ambulance service for many years in Ireland. Having recently added four new Pilatus PC12NG aircraft to its fleet, the Air Corps is awaiting delivery of two Airbus C295 aircraft, which will allow a significant increase in the capability it provides.

The HSE National Ambulance Service, in conjunction with the Irish Air Corps and the Department of Defence, also operates an Emergency Aeromedical Service, which is based at Custume Barracks in Athlone and is staffed by an Air Corps flight crew and an NAS Advanced Paramedic.

For further information visit www.nationalambulance.ie



Medicine, Eimhear is based at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust Hospital in Manchester.

Interestingly, Lisa and Eimhear overlapped for a month last August at EHAAT. "My rotas were flexible allowing me to work in EHAAT and Salford," said Eimhear, who now also takes shifts with the North West Air Ambulance, which has three helicopters covering Greater Manchester, Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, and Cheshire, and flies out of Barton and Blackpool airports.

In Salford, rotas are set out 16-20 weeks in advance and monthly with North West Air Ambulance, with consultants encouraged and facilitated to work within their means and to pursue their areas of interest.

"It's hard to work full-time in an Emergency Department – some do – and working less than full-time is encouraged on the basis that pursuing your area of interest – whether that's sports medicine, paediatrics, or in my case, the air ambulance – makes you happier."

Eimhear loves her role with the



The Irish Coast Guard also provides additional air support, using their range of SAR Helicopters, based at Shannon, Dublin, Sligo and Waterford.

For information on Essex and Hertfordshire Air Ambulance visit <https://www.ehaat.org/> and for North West Air Ambulance visit <https://nwaa.net/>



North West Air Ambulance, which flew 199 missions in October 2020 alone. "Similar to the other air ambulance services, it is a charity, and costs Stg£2400 for each mission – sometimes, it flies five missions daily, and we have three helicopters.

"There's been impressive progress in HEMS from the EMT to the Advanced Paramedic specialist – and there is now training for critical care paramedics, giving them more autonomy so that they can do more."

MORE STRUCTURE AND SUPPORT

As a consultant with the Air North West Ambulance service, Eimhear is slow to give up that experience when no similar role in the helicopter emergency medical service (HEMS) – or flexibility to include it – exists in Ireland.

"In addition, consultant numbers in Ireland are very low – we have 20 consultants in the Emergency Department in Salford, whereas you would only have five or six in Ireland, so you can see why burnout in a similar ED is such an issue there.

"Add in the 30 per cent disparity in pay between new consultants and those appointed before 2012, and the lengthy out-patient waiting lists among the worst in Europe. Ireland needs to make it more attractive to come home", Eimhear claimed.

Money is not a factor, she said. "I don't get paid as much in the UK as I would in Ireland" – but the system in the UK is more structured and more supportive, "and I can

do my HEMS work".

The UK medical sector is also more flexible in terms of speciality registrar training times.

"The NHS encourages trainees to spend 50-80% of their time as a trainee, which allows them time for caring or family roles and the time is just added on to the end of the training time. And it is a robust system, requiring mandatory portfolios of evidence of learning.

"Yes, the UK is a bigger country and there's loads of bureaucracy in the NHS, but it's a friendlier environment and is able to sustain more staff," Eimhear noted.



"The system in the UK is more structured and more supportive, and I can do my HEMS work" – Eimhear Quinn, Consultant in Emergency Medicine.

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CORK AIRPORT TAKES PANDEMIC PRIORITIES ON BOARD



Following the outbreak of Covid-19 last year, Cork Airport reviewed its emergency plans to consider the emerging threat of the virus, moving rapidly to work with the public health authorities, according to Ken Roberts, Chief Fire Officer, who outlines the protocols they put in place to deal with this pandemic.

Cork Airport welcomed 2020 with great expectations as we looked forward to another bumper year of growth and to maintaining our record as the fastest growing airport in Ireland.

We had so many big plans – new carriers, new routes and new destinations – and then the pandemic struck. It is hard to believe that 12 months later we're now in yet another lockdown, yet the future looks brighter with a vaccination programme now underway.

As with any regulatory environment the requirements of our internal or external audit regime did not diminish due to the pandemic. As part of the airport emergency operations plan, Cork Airport is required to conduct periodic table-top and live emergency exercises.

In February 2019 we held one such table-top exercise with the key principal response agencies and interested parties. The 'scenario' was based on an in-bound aircraft with passengers on-board having a communicable disease. Little could we have envisaged that one year later we would be gearing up for the real thing!



I have worked in aviation for over 21 years, I have seen the effects of 9-11, SARS and the volcanic ash cloud on aviation but like these events, this Covid pandemic will also pass. We will beat this and yes if we stay the course, there are brighter days ahead

- Ken Roberts, Cork Airport's Chief Fire Officer

DEALING WITH EMERGING PANDEMIC THREAT

Moving rapidly to work with the HSE's Departments of Public Health and Environmental Health, we reviewed our plans to consider the emerging pandemic threat of COVID-19. These plans were based on an in-bound flight and the requirements to quarantine the flight. Luckily, at Cork Airport, we did not have to activate these plans.

However, we did find ourselves providing assistance to the public health authorities with contact tracing. At the

early stage of the pandemic we remained open to allow for repatriation of Irish nationals back home.

Slowly and steadily, as we realised just how serious and devastating this pandemic was evolving, passenger numbers reduced while the number of flights into and out of Cork, and indeed all airports globally, reduced dramatically.

When we think of an airport, most people just think it is there to help them travel for business, pleasure or personal, such as traveling to visit a sick relative or even traveling to bring home a loved one who may have passed away. However, airports are there for so much more.

ASSISTING A DIVERSE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

Cork Airport is a strategic piece of national aviation infrastructure and throughout the pandemic we have remained open and available to provide assistance for a diverse range of activities such as the following:



Throughout the pandemic Cork Airport continues to provide HEMS assistance to the Irish Coast Guard and the Irish Air Corps.



The airport's fire crews train on a regular basis to ensure that skill-sets are kept to an optimum level.

- **Search & Rescue** – Irish Coast Guard Helicopters.
- **HEMS** – Irish Air Corps Rescue 112/ Irish Community Rapid Response Air Ambulance.
- **Crew Transport** – Babcock International (serving offshore rigs off the south coast).
- **Transplant Flights** – Irish Air Corps CASA aircraft or private aircraft.
- **State Security** – An Garda Síochána's Air Support Unit.
- **Training Flights** – Atlantic Flight Training Academy (based at Cork Airport).

MAINTAINING SKILL-SETS

During this time, we have replaced our domestic fire tender and one of our major foam tenders. Our crews underwent extensive training on both new vehicles – a domestic Compact Line and the 6x6 Panther – which came from Rosenbauer (one of the world's three largest manufacturers of fire service vehicles and firefighting equipment, based in Austria).

Any change to our fire fleet requires the airport operator to work through a management of change process and to gain approval from the regulator.



The process in changing any of our big fleet vehicles takes months of work from the business case to getting approval for funding, procurement processes, testing, delivery, and associated training requirements, before the vehicles are finally ready for service.

We all had to get used to the new 'norm' – wearing face masks, social distancing and hand sanitisation. We implemented new training protocols to allow us to continue training during the pandemic, and it is vital that the crews continue to train on a regular basis to ensure that skill-sets are kept at an optimum level.

MONITORING WILDLIFE

Due to the decrease in standard commercial aviation traffic, there has been an increase in wildlife activity.

This needs to be monitored closely and documented to ensure that the safety of flight activity is not negatively impacted.

STAFF WELLBEING

daa Group, which operates both Dublin and Cork Airports, delivers a key focus on safety for those utilising the airports and staff members.

Cork Airport was the first airport in the State to achieve the Airport Council International's Airport Health Accreditation Programme Certificate.

Staff wellbeing has come to the fore during this pandemic; its important to keep in touch with colleagues, from socially-distanced briefings to zoom meetings...with the most common saying "you're on mute!"

For those staff required to be onsite, staff testing is now part of the norm with a COVID test centre on the airport campus.

POLICING DURING THE PANEDMIC

Traditionally the only day that there are no passengers going through Cork Airport is on Christmas Day. However, policing the airport campus during this



Airport crews have undergone extensive training on the new domestic fire tender and one of the new major foam tenders.

pandemic is now quite eerie, to say the least.

The normally buzzing terminal, with passengers and staff, is currently devoid of people; the normally full carpark stands empty and there are very few visitors to the airport, except those from the local community who venture out for the bit of exercise.

However, regardless of the situation, the airport and the campus must be constantly policed to ensure the security of this vital piece of state infrastructure.

CRISIS PRESENTS OPPORTUNITY

With every crisis there is opportunity. Cork Airport started a number of big infrastructure projects during the pandemic as follows:

- Refurbishment of the departures lounge floor.
- Upgrade of the airport hold baggage screening process with new state-of-the-art security x-ray screening machines making air travel more safe and secure.
- Upgrade of the airport's car parking facilities.

- Upgrade to the IT flight information displays.
- Installation of a COVID test centre.

Celebrating 60 years in operation this year, Cork Airport is also in the final stages of sign-off for a runway reconstruction project, which is the biggest runway project since the airport first opened in 1961.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

When we look back on 2020 and 2021, we will firstly reflect on the terrible loss of those who have succumbed to the coronavirus both nationally and globally. We will recognise that the world did come together to fight a single foe.

I have worked in the aviation industry for over 21 years. I have seen the effects of 9-11, SARS and the volcanic ash cloud on aviation, but like these events, this Covid pandemic will also pass. We will beat this and, yes if we stay the course, there are brighter days ahead.

As an island nation it is in our genes to travel far and wide. Aviation will be here to cater for those needs, and we patiently wait for the time when we can welcome people back to our shore and wish them a 'Cead Míle Fáilte'.

As a nation we will be ready and we at Cork Airport stand ready.



SECURITY AND SAFETY IN OPERATION

The role of the Airport Fire & Rescue Service at a state aerodrome is divided into two main key areas of operation – Security and Safety.

Security: To provide a policing security presence under the remit of Airports and Aviation Acts (Irish Statutory Instrument) and EU Regulation 300 of 2008 and associated EU regulation in the field of civil aviation security in relation to surveillance and patrols.

Safety: To provide a Rescue Firefighting Service to the aviation sector in line with the EU Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). The Airport Fire Service is also responsible for additional safety-related tasks such as wildlife management, runway inspections and the airports snow and ice plan.

The Chief Airport Fire Officer is responsible for airport emergency plan and liaises closely with the county inter-agency emergency planning office. In the areas of security and safety the key elements are to ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements. Everyday auditability is a vital aspect to the role of the Airport Police & Fire Service.

€61 MILLION CAPITAL PROGRAMME ROLLED OUT FOR FIRE SERVICE

A new €61 million Fire Service Capital Programme (2021-2025) will see six new fire stations built, continued support for the construction of a further 12 new fire stations, nine fire station refurbishments, in addition to the allocation of 35 new fire engines.

Outlining details of the new Fire Service Capital Programme, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien TD, said that his department will provide over €61 million in grant aid for newly-built fire stations, refurbished stations, new fire engines, equipment and facilities between now and 2025.

"Following close consultation with local authorities my department carried out a comprehensive analysis of their proposals for fire stations; 27 stations across the country will either be built or refurbished over the lifetime of this plan."

Communications and mobilisation

systems will continue to be upgraded, while at least one new fire engine will be delivered to each county.

Cork is set to receive three fire engines, while Dublin will receive four new engines, in addition to funding for the construction of high rise and tunnel training facilities at the Fire Brigade Training Centre in Marino (costing approximately €1.1 million).

NEW FLEET TO HIT THE ROAD

Works will also be undertaken to accommodate turntable ladders in two fire stations in Finglas and Rathfarnham (at a cost of €1 million), as well as the significant investment in communications, infrastructure and training.

"In order to maintain a reliable fleet in optimal condition, a total of €27.7 million has been allocated for fire appliances, to be delivered in two tranches. In the first tranche, 35 new appliances will be provided at a cost of almost €16 million, the Minister noted..

"Separately, in Dublin, where requirements are in some ways unique, my department will, as a matter of priority, critically and comprehensively evaluate funding needs over the next few years.

"This is a clear demonstration of the Government's support for our fire service and the work they do in protecting people, communities, property and local infrastructure from fire and other emergency situations."

A further spend of €12 million (to accommodate 20-25 additional appliances) is proposed for the period 2024-2025, with the precise breakdown of this spend to be finalised at a later date.



Following his launch of the €61m Capital Programme, Minister Darragh O'Brien pictured with fire officers and firefighters at Swords Fire Station, which has been allocated a new fire engine under the four-year programme.

PANDEMIC PROJECT LISTENS TO FIRST RESPONDERS' CONCERNS



A new report from Dublin City University, on the experiences of pre-hospital first responders during the Covid-19 pandemic, has found that contracting the virus and passing it to loved ones was a primary source of worry for them, while a lack of facilities and equipment needed for protection and sanitisation was also found to cause distress.

A range of ethical dilemmas faced by first responders were also highlighted as part of the report, including having to bring people to hospitals while knowing this increased the risk of infection to the patient.

Respondents also felt conflicted by having to stop

families from accompanying their loved ones to the hospital, knowing they may never see them again and decisions concerning ventilation and resuscitation were often challenging.

Despite this, a sense of duty and collegiality motivated first responders. The public outpouring of gratitude, and community spirit were sources of strength and support to participants throughout the pandemic. Trust in the government's leadership and guidance from the Chief Medical Officer Dr Tony Holohan also mitigated some of the stress and worry for these workers during the pandemic.

PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Funded as part of DCU's COVID-19 Research and Innovation Hub, the LISTEN project highlights the experiences of first responders who have been completing

testing, medical assessment and initial treatment of suspected COVID-19 cases across a range of settings.

It looks at levels of risk, impact and worry in relation to COVID-19, as well as the perception of preparedness and response, alongside their experience of staff safety, health and wellbeing. It is hoped the findings will help inform the current response to COVID-19, risk management in the medium-term, and help build longer-term national resilience.

Speaking about the importance of the research and its findings, Prof Caroline McMullan, Professor of Business & Society at DCU Business School and the report's author, said: "This research records the voice of an often overlooked, yet critical element of the COVID-19 response and gives us all an opportunity to learn from their response.

"Notwithstanding all the worries, duties of care, ethical dilemmas and risks, first responders continued their work as pre-hospital healthcare professionals during the most unprecedented and challenging health emergency in the history of the State. The public's acknowledgement



Firefighters who participated in the study were drawn largely from Dublin Fire Brigade.

of their work reflects the outstanding debt owed by society to first responders during this pandemic."

The data is based on a sample of 815 responses, with the largest representation from the HSE National Ambulance Service (accounting for just over 45% of

respondents), followed by fire service personnel, drawn largely from Dublin Fire Brigade, which deliver fire and ambulance services for the city.

Responses were collected during the first response phase between 30 April and 17 May 2020, just before the restrictions were lifted.

KEY FINDINGS OF DCU RESEARCH REPORT

- 92% of respondents believe their occupation placed them at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 – largely due to regular contact with infected or asymptomatic patients.
- Contracting COVID-19 and passing it to loved ones was a primary source of worry for 82% of respondents.
- Duty of care to patients created tensions with the duty of care for first responders' families – especially around the increased risk of contracting COVID-19.
- A lack of facilities and issues with uniforms and PPE caused distress.
- First responders faced a range of ethical dilemmas, including bringing people to hospitals while knowing this increased the risk of infection for patients.
- Decisions concerning ventilation and resuscitation were often challenging.
- Respondents felt conflicted by having to stop families from accompanying their loved ones to hospital, knowing they may never see their relatives again.
- Trust in the government's leadership and guidance from the Chief Medical Officer mitigated some of the stress and worry during the pandemic.
- A sense of duty and collegiality motivated first responders. The public outpouring of gratitude, and community spirit were sources of strength and support to participants throughout the pandemic.





COMMUNITY BOATS PLAY CENTRAL ROLE IN RIVER RESCUES

Operating on our coasts and major inland waterways, a wide network of community-based rescue boats has resulted in a major reduction in the number of drowning tragedies on Ireland's waters. Peigin Doyle looks at the work of some of these voluntary organisations around the country in providing invaluable assistance to the frontline emergency services.

If you are tossed from your canoe on a stormy inland lake, pulled out to sea on a strong current or trapped by underwater debris while angling, there is a good chance that one of the Community Rescue Boats of Ireland will come to your aid.

Community Rescue Boats Ireland is not a formal organisation but the name given a national network of independent, community-based rescue services that operate on our coasts and major inland waterways.

All rescue boats work closely with the Irish Coast Guard, An Garda Síochána and Water Safety Ireland. While

some boats may operate 24/7 all year round, certain units operate 24/7 for the time it takes for a rescue or recovery of a body, while others provide suicide prevention and safety patrols to help people at risk on the quayside or the waterside.

Among community rescue boats, the highest level of involvement in terms of time coverage are units that are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Coast Guard may deem such a station a 'declared resource' (DR) and call it out whenever needed.

The most important criterion for 'declared resource'



Wexford MarineWatch volunteers pictured on night patrol along Wexford Harbour – all volunteers undergo specific training, including the SafeTALK course on suicide awareness.

status is that a rescue station is able to muster its crew and put to sea within 15 minutes. When human lives are at risk, speed is essential.

They must also meet stringent standards of equipment and training, as set down by the Coast Guard and implemented by Water Safety Ireland, which carries out regular inspections of VAT-exempt boats on shore and at sea.

“We use the International Maritime Rescue Federation’s standards but all our boats are above that level.. We regularly liaise with the Coast Guard and the RNLI to ensure the correct standards are in operation,” according to John Leech, CEO of Water Safety Ireland.

VAT EMEMPTION STATUS

Stations that are a ‘declared resource’ qualify for a special VAT exemption, which was introduced under the Value-Added Tax (Refund of Tax; Rescue Boats and Related Equipment) Order 2013.

The scheme was launched by the then Taoiseach Enda Kenny in his home town of Castlebar, Co. Mayo in August 2013.

The VAT exemption scheme means that rescue units can deduct tax on the cost of hire, importation, supply, repair, modification or maintenance of a boat of gross tonnage of 15 tons or less, which is designed, built or adapted for the purpose of rescue or assistance at sea

or on inland waterways. Equipment and buildings housing such craft may also qualify in accordance with the exemption order.

They must also satisfy the Revenue Commissioners, by providing documentary evidence from Water Safety Ireland that they both provide water rescue or assistance services and meet the standards required by Water Safety Ireland. About 14 community units have been granted VAT exemption status under this particular piece of legislation.

Units that are not a declared resource may be called out also by the Coast Guard as a ‘vessel of opportunity’ when many rescue boats may be needed to help with body recovery.

Only units that meet the standards for VAT exemption may take part in sea rescue missions with the Coast Guard, which is in charge of offshore rescue and recovery.

Others concentrate on body recovery, prevention of drowning and raising awareness of water safety. A rescue service that is not on permanent call liaises with An Garda Síochána, which is responsible for co-ordinating rescue or recovery operations on inland waters.

The pattern of rescue work has changed in some cases. For example, although Ballybunion Sea and Cliff Rescue is on 24-hour call, “most calls are for land searches for people who are missing,” said PRO Emmet Lynch.

SUICIDE PREVENTION UNITS

Side by side with rescue and recovery work are shore-based volunteers who mount regular harm prevention and suicide watch foot patrols, checking waterside areas where people might

WATER TRAGEDIES

Of approximately 124 drownings that occur in a year:

- 76% are men and 24% are women.
- 62% of all drownings happen in inland rivers or lakes.
- On average 11 people drown per month.
- Almost one-third of drowning victims in the last 10 years had taken alcohol.
- One-third of all drownings within the last 25 years have been recorded as ‘suicide’.



be at risk or thinking of self-harming.

Wexford MarineWatch and Galway's Claddagh Watch Patrol are two such suicide prevention units. The volunteers do not enter the water during a rescue, and will call out the RNLI unit; for assistance.

To illustrate this close relationship, George Lawlor from Wexford MarineWatch said: "If somebody is on the wrong side of the railings, the RNLI boat waits under the bridge so as not to frighten them by launching".

In many areas there are two separate units; one unit operates a land-based rescue while the second one responds to water rescues. Drogheda, on the Boyne River, is served by three units - the Coast Guard station, the Boyne Fishermen's Rescue and Recovery Unit (which is on permanent call) and an independent unit.

"We encourage areas to have two units because it is all about safety in the water and saving people. The land-based units do fantastic



Pictured at the launch of the VAT exemption order in Castlebar, Co. Mayo in August 2013 were John Leech, CEO of Water Safety Ireland, the then Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Breda Collins, then Chairperson of Irish Water Safety, and two members of Corrib & Mask Rescue (the first community rescue lifeboat to avail of VAT exemption under the new legislation).

WEXFORD MARINEWATCH

The RNLI, Coast Guard, Civil Defence, the HSE National Ambulance Service, the fire services and local authorities set up Wexford MarineWatch in 2012, and this inter-agency co-operation has since helped to make the initiative a success.

The organisation operates suicide prevention and safety patrols several nights each week to reduce the high number of suicides and deaths in Wexford Harbour. An average of 16 people a year previously lost their lives in the harbour, but now due to the huge efforts of Wexford MarineWatch, the figure has significantly dropped.

"The bridge and harbour area was a hotspot for people attempting to self-harm," noted George Lawlor of Wexford MarineWatch. "Since 2012, we've had 405 incidents, 196 interventions and patrolled for 7,500 hours."



Over 120 volunteers operate regular patrols at Wexford's harbour, quays and bridge on the River Slaney, to watch out for individuals who may be at risk at the waterside, due to alcohol or drugs intake, or who may attempt to self-harm.

All volunteers undergo a specific training programme on water safety, first aid, rescue equipment, radio communication, and the 'SafeTALK' course on suicide awareness, in addition to daytime and night-time training exercises with the local RNLI crew, to prepare them for various scenarios.

Trained to recognise when a person is distressed or suicidal, volunteers engage with the person. However, if a vulnerable person is already in the water, support is then requested from the RNLI.

Having received support and advice from Waterford Marine Search and Rescue, Wexford MarineWatch recently assisted Claddagh Watch Patrol to launch a similar service on Galway city's waterways. For further information visit www.wexfordmarinewatch.com

work in terms of recovery of bodies and they also raise awareness of water safety,” said John Leech.

COMMUNITY RESCUE SUPPORT

All community rescue boat units are supported by public fundraising and sponsorship. For this reason, most units register as a charity and are listed on the Public Register of Charities.

Many rescue units are set up by communities in response to local tragedies. Some units start off as part of a sub-aqua club. Many in time become RNLI lifeboats, like Belmullet and Bundoran. Boyne River Rescue Unit grew out of a tradition whereby local fishermen would stop all fishing work and search for missing colleagues until they were found.

Communities who consider setting up a rescue service will contact Water Safety Ireland to discuss the options. A unit may operate on permanent call for a trial period to see if they can maintain the service. Many may decide that they cannot ask their volunteers to make such a heavy time commitment and opt to do regular patrols in co-operation

with the Gardaí. Water Safety Ireland will give them advice, and provide training and safety promotion material.

NATIONAL RECOVERY NETWORK

VAT-exempt units tend to have a very close relationship with Water Safety Ireland especially at the setting-up stage. Water Safety Ireland organises at least one and usually two conferences each year for the VAT-exempt boats, to keep up the contact. The National Search and Rescue Co-ordination Committee, comprising the Coast Guard, the RNLI, the Garda Síochána and Water Safety Ireland, normally meet twice a year.

While working at different levels of capacity, all are highly effective and contribute to a national water rescue and recovery network that has seen drownings drop significantly in the last 20 years. At latest count, 39 communities around Ireland, on coast or on shore, operated recovery or rescue craft.

“Together all these rescue units have brought a huge reduction in the level of drownings over the last 20 years. We are at the lowest level of drownings ever in the history of the State,” noted Water Safety Ireland’s Chief Executive.

BALLYBUNION SEA AND CLIFF RESCUE

Ballybunion Sea and Cliff Rescue volunteers are on pager-alert 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, serving the coast of North Kerry, West Limerick and the Shannon Estuary to Foynes and inland to Abbeyfeale. They also turn out for inland rescues between Glin and Killarney.

The unit, which has been running for 35 years, currently has two boats in operation – an EA-16D-Class inflatable and an Atlantic 75 (B-class) RIB, both built to RNLI specifications.

Most of their call-outs involve searches for missing people and body recovery. Sea call-outs are less common as boating equipment has improved greatly, and the type of incidents they mainly respond to include leisure boating activities that go wrong, people blown out to sea on rubber floats or fishermen falling off the rocks.

Of the 25-40 average membership, only three are needed on a call-out to launch a boat. Many volunteers do land-based work, such as fundraising, while about 20 members are on pager-alert duty for launches.

“Over 35 years we have never failed to launch a boat. If your pager goes off and you can respond, then you respond,” noted Emmet Lynch, Public Relations Officer.

“Most call-outs are for land searches. We do not rescue people drowning at sea. We rescue people who have gone missing during the previous few hours. We get up to 120 calls a year, and there is a significant recovery of bodies of those who go missing. We are glad to be able to bring them home because there can be a funeral and families can properly grieve.”



For further information visit www.ballybunionrescue.com

TAPPING INTO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT ONLINE

There has been a great response to a free new mental health service to support people working at the frontline during Covid-19. The initiative has been provided by turn2me – the first organisation in Ireland to provide professional mental health support services entirely online, with funding from Sláintecare.

This instant messaging service is available for a wide range of frontline workers, from those working in the healthcare sector, the retail trade, to teachers and tradespeople.

Each session is facilitated by a mental health professional and supported by trained volunteers. There are 20 groups available each week, with job specific groups available, as well as those with shared issues such as stress, burnout and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Groups are scheduled at different times each day throughout the week to accommodate shift workers, and participants can remain anonymous when online. The content and timings of the groups were developed following consultation and discussion with frontline workers from different disciplines.

EXPERIENCES TAKE THEIR TOLL

Launching the service, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly TD said; “While the majority of people were asked to stay at home, our frontline workers went to work, including our healthcare professionals who acted selflessly, putting their own health at risk, in order to care for their patients.”

Laura Magahy, Executive Director of Sláintecare, said; “One of the main goals of Sláintecare is to support innovative initiatives that help people engage in their own health and the stepped model of care provided by turn2me is a fantastic example of just that, providing the right care, at the right time and in the right place.

Brian Holohan, Clinical Manager with turn2me, said; “Demand for our services increased significantly; at the peak of the pandemic in early 2020.. It has been challenging for everyone, but especially our frontline workers.

“The adverse psychological impact of working in such stressful

circumstances, while at the same time dealing with the reality of Covid-19 in their personal lives, should not be underestimated. There’s a large evidence base that peer support is effective and can also act as a helpful gateway for people who haven’t reached out for help before.”

IMPORTANCE OF PEER SUPPORT

As well as being facilitated by a mental health professional, peer support is an important part of the turn2me model.

Kerry’s Elaine O’Donoghue is a community builder volunteer with turn2me, and having worked as a teacher for more than 10 years she understands the pressures facing frontline workers only too well.

“Like many people, I struggle with my mental health sometimes and living in a rural part of Ireland I found it hard to find a service that was accessible. Making that first step to seek help can be hard but the anonymous nature of the service means that you

can be completely honest and open, in a non-judgemental environment. There’s a real comfort in that when you’re feeling vulnerable or mentally unwell, as it unburdens the mind.

“Many frontline workers feel the need to maintain a brave face, and to act like they’re always confident and in control. Admitting you’re stressed or struggling can feel like a sign of weakness but it’s not. Talking to other people in the same situation can really help.”

If feeling unwell, her advice on where or how to start is to log on to **turn2me.ie** on a phone or laptop. “The thought catcher and support groups are like a scaffolding to help you take the first step and provide a starting point for conversation,” she says.

“A community of people are there to provide support, and who know what you’re going through. There’s also the option to access professional counselling,” she added.



Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly TD, pictured with Jennifer Griffin, General Manager, and Brian Holohan, Clinical Manager of ‘turn2me’ outside the offices of the Department of Health.

AMBULANCE SERVICE RENEWS CRITICAL HEALTHCARE AGREEMENT

Critical Healthcare, Ireland's leading provider of specialist frontline medical and healthcare products to emergency services both at home and abroad, has renewed its contract with the HSE National Ambulance Service (worth up to €15m) for a further three-year period.

The National Ambulance Service operates from over 100 ambulance stations located across Ireland and Critical Healthcare will now be the managed service provider for all medical consumables to the service on a national basis.

Since 2014, the National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been working with and utilising Critical Healthcare for the purchase and supply of emergency medical supplies and patient consumable products throughout the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Under the new three-year contract the company will supply a wide range of medical consumable products required by ambulance staff within the service in the delivery of every aspect of patient care and comfort.

Products will include personal protective equipment, resuscitation equipment, dressings, bandages, surgical masks, oxygen masks, temperature and blood pressure monitors, syringes and needles, disposable linen, stretcher sheets and fleece blankets.

The move follows news that Critical Healthcare has invested over €500,000 in a new 30,000 sq. ft headquarters facility in Tullamore, Co. Offaly. In addition to expanding its physical location, the company has also increased its workforce to over 30 employees.

SEAMLESS SUPPLY CHAIN

Critical Healthcare will continue to utilise its bespoke and innovative online procurement software – Medlogistix – to fulfil its contract with the NAS. This pre-authorised system allows its customers to order products on a 24/7/365 basis and can be accessed remotely via a secure web portal, allowing for a seamless and standardised supply chain, which is essential in a demand-driven, pressurised emergency service environment.

A number of the consumable products supplied to the National Ambulance Service will come from the MediLinen and Duramedic product range, which have been developed in-house by Critical Healthcare.

Dr Anne Cusack, CEO of Critical Healthcare, said: "This contract represents an important endorsement for Critical Healthcare's Medlogistix software, which is recommended by the UK's 'Lord Carter Review' as Best Practice and the positive impact our solution continues to have on the



Critical Healthcare's CEO Dr Anne Cusack and Managing Director Seamus Reilly pictured outside their headquarters in Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

National Ambulance Service's network.

"The HSE defines patient care consumable products and any other products as the medical, surgical, janitorial and any other consumables that are required by the day-to-day operation of ambulance stations and vehicles. The managed solutions will require Critical Healthcare to purchase, warehouse and deliver on a consolidation basis the range of consumable products required for the National Ambulance Service throughout the HSE."

Martin Dunne, Director of the National Ambulance Service said that the company's Medlogistix system had been an invaluable asset to the service, particularly in this Covid-19 pandemic. "Ensuring timely and seamless delivery of essential equipment, the management solution will add even greater value to the services in managing the process in this dynamic environment," he added.

Established in 2000, the Midlands company has a diverse range of customers that covers emergency services, armed forces and local authorities, with further expansion now on the cards.

An approved HSE and NHS supplier, Critical Healthcare works with emergency service providers in Ireland, UK, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, France, Spain and Poland, ensuring that healthcare professionals have all of the essential medical products they require to diagnose, resuscitate and rehabilitate a patient.

DOCTOR ADVOCATES CPR TRAINING AFTER SAVING HER DAD'S LIFE

A young doctor is urging people to learn CPR after saving her father's life when he suffered a cardiac arrest while they were out cycling. Dr Caoimhe Costigan made her call during the Irish Heart Foundation's annual 'Restart a Heart Day' awareness campaign – a two-week online initiative, which took place instead of the usual live classes for the public due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Dr Caoimhe Costigan was out for a bike ride with her dad Colm, who is also a doctor, in rural Co Tipperary when she noticed he was slowing down and had dismounted. He collapsed shortly afterwards.

"I literally put my phone on speaker, put it on Dad's chest and rang 999. I just started doing CPR without thinking about it really – the man on the phone was very

helpful. I said to him that I was a doctor and that I was doing CPR," said Caoimhe, from Glasnevin in Dublin.

"I was desperately worried about dad. I just kept trying to remember the stories of others who had survived a cardiac arrest with good-quality CPR. I didn't do any doctoring at the side of the road – it was because I knew CPR. There was literally nothing else I could have done."

Both Colm and Caoimhe Costigan encouraged everyone to learn how to do CPR at the start of 'Restart A Heart Day' (16 October 2020). CPR can triple a person's chances of survival from a cardiac arrest. While classes for the public have ceased due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Irish Heart Foundation launched a two-week online 'Restart a Heart' campaign instead to help the public to learn the lifesaving steps.

The charity commissioned an online video featuring the character of 'Manny Quinn' that emphasises the two essential steps when performing CPR on a person in cardiac arrest.

The first step is to call 999 or 112 while the second is to push hard and fast on the centre of the chest.



Colm Costigan's life was saved by his daughter Caoimhe performing CPR on him when he had a cardiac arrest while out cycling. (Pic. Robbie Reynolds)



A still from the Irish Heart Foundation's new online video campaign, featuring 'Manny Quinn' to help the public to learn the life-saving steps in CPR which can triple a person's chances of survival from a cardiac arrest.

Caoimhe recalled pausing her CPR only briefly to ask somebody to give directions to the emergency services. It was a full 22 minutes before the Gardaí arrived on the scene followed by paramedics, fire brigades and an army air ambulance. At that stage Caoimhe was able to step back and allow the ambulance crew to take over – crucially they had a defibrillator.

CHANCE OF SURVIVAL INCREASED

"It went on for quite a long time. Finally, after the third or maybe the fourth shock from the defibrillator, I heard one of the guys shout that he had a pulse," she said.

After emergency services were able to resuscitate him, Colm was airlifted to Limerick University Hospital, where he had a stent inserted followed by months of recovery. Caoimhe believes that anyone can do what she did for her dad, and that her medical training was not a factor.

While the 'Manny Quinn' video has an element of eye-catching fun, the message is very serious, explained Brigid Sinnott, Resuscitation Manager at the Irish Heart Foundation.

"Thousands of people die every year in Ireland from cardiac arrest and 70% of those happen at home in front of a loved one," she said.

"If someone who knows CPR can start performing compressions quickly they can double or even triple a person's chances of survival. In 2018, 176 people survived a cardiac arrest because of the actions of somebody who knew CPR. If an extra 100,000 people learn CPR, we could potentially save an additional 60 lives

a year on average."

'HANDS FOR LIFE' TRAINING

However, Sinnott said that a person's chance of survival drops by 10% for every minute that passes without somebody performing CPR or using a defibrillator on them.

"At the Irish Heart Foundation we want to create a nation of lifesavers by training as many people as possible in CPR."

The Foundation launched a free community 'Hands for Life' training programme in CPR in 2019 to offer training to 100,000 people in local community centres, clubs and libraries throughout the country.

"The programme was very successful, but due to the pandemic we have had to stop running CPR classes, and we needed to innovate to spread our message. So, we are urging people to watch Manny Quinn's video on irishheart.ie to understand what to do when faced with a cardiac emergency.

"The more people who know what to do in a case of cardiac arrest, it's more likely a person, who suffers a cardiac arrest, will receive this simple lifesaving treatment. It is really important for people to realise that they don't have to be a trained doctor or medical professional to perform CPR – anybody can do it.", Sinnott noted.

A NATION OF LIFESAVERS

The Irish Heart Foundation's annual campaign is supported by global healthcare company Abbott and ESB Networks. "At Abbott, we work to keep hearts healthy with our life-changing technologies and through partnerships with the Irish Heart Foundation and our local communities," noted Conor Murphy, Abbott's Site Director.

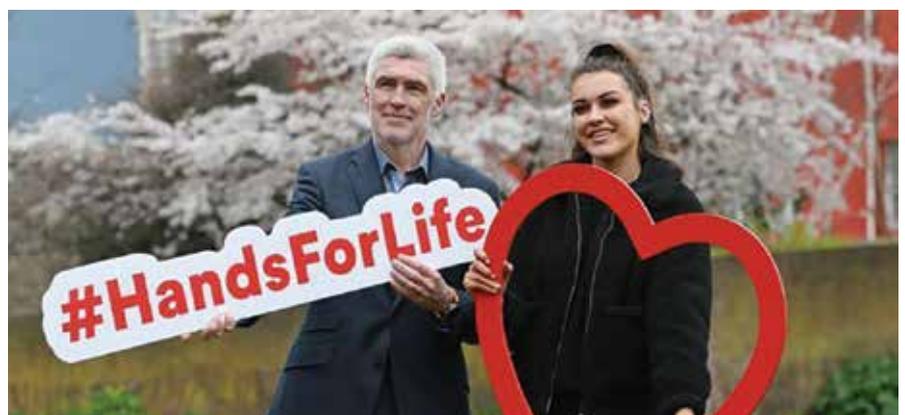
"We know CPR saves lives, and by engaging with this online video people across Ireland can be equipped with the practical knowledge they need to step in and save a life in the most serious of situations," he added.

Paul Mulvaney, Executive Director of ESB Networks, said his company plays a fundamental role in every community across Ireland "and by supporting the work of the Irish Heart Foundation, we're empowering people to be part of a nation of lifesavers".

ESB Networks is also encouraging people to watch this video to equip themselves with the knowledge of what to do if a family member or friend falls into cardiac arrest.

"Even if you have learned CPR in the past it is a good reminder of the simple steps for this life-saving procedure."

For more information on the Irish Heart Foundation's campaigns visit www.irishheart.ie



Tim Collins, CEO of the Irish Heart Foundation, pictured with Mater Hospital nurse Aoife McGivney, who launched the IHF's free CPR training initiative in 2019. However, the outbreak of the pandemic since March 2020 has since put a halt to the CPR classes.

ADVANCED PARAMEDIC MOVES FROM FRONTLINE TO ACADEMIC WORLD

As advanced paramedic Kieran Henry retires from the HSE National Ambulance Service, he recalls the highs and lows of a 30-year career, responding to emergency call-outs throughout Ireland. Stepping down as Operations Resource Manager in his native Cork, he says it's time to move on and looks forward to the next chapter of his life.



Kieran Henry pictured with NEOC Manager Gavin Doyle at the first drone trials by the NAS in the Southern Region in July 2018.

Having responded to thousands of emergency calls during his career in the HSE National Ambulance Service, Kieran Henry is stepping back from the frontline after nearly 30 years.

"The Ambulance Service is like having a second family. You spend lots of days and nights working closely with colleagues in often difficult situations," says Kieran (50) from Turner's Cross in Cork City, who recently retired from the HSE National Ambulance Service as Operations Resource Manager with for the Southern Region.

"The family ethos doesn't end there. Everyone supports each other when needed, especially after what may have been a tragic or sad call," says Kieran. However, some call-outs are joyous, bringing glad tidings.

"Yes, happy events with happy results are always great. I remember my first call-out assisting at the birth of a new-born was in Youghal. The baby was born in a house on a cold night in the early 1990s. I estimate

that I assisted with more than 20 babies being born during my career, either in their home or in the back of the ambulance," he fondly recalls.

As part and parcel of his job, Kieran experienced both good and bad days. "Caring for people for us happened on the best days of their lives and at end of life." He has met and helped people from all walks of life.

"You get to meet people often on what may be one of the worst days of their lives when they may have been involved in a car crash and have sustained a traumatic injury or perhaps a collapse in their home or street."

'FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE'

"As a paramedic, you can expect to be called to any type of emergency, anywhere, anytime. We have assisted people from the cradle to the grave." Sometimes, the ambulance crew, acting spontaneously, answers urgent calls with blood pumping, brains whirring, and an extra jolt of

adrenaline, bringing all their collective expertise to transport the patient to definitive care. However, they don't always achieve the positive outcome they want.

"I saw many traumas in my time. And I was with many people when they died." He was often the reluctant bearer of bad news. "You do your best to support relatives and you hope your efforts to resuscitate their loved one may bring slight comfort to them. And also the fact that you may have been with the person when they died and, therefore, they were not alone as they passed away from this life may bring added comfort to families."

Kieran was highly trained and on high alert to assist at every situation he had to face. "As a paramedic, you can expect to see so many extremes, even sometimes within one shift. That could involve a person fighting to die whilst another person is fighting to live."

Duty called in many guises, from the pauper to the prince. "One day you could be on duty for a high profile event such as Cork City



For five years Kieran Henry worked with the Irish Air Corps as flight paramedic on Ireland's first Emergency Aeromedical Service. Kieran is pictured with the EAS aircrew and ground crew at Custume Barracks, Athlone.

Marathon or on one of the royal visits over the years. Then you could be on a back street with a person who is down and out and who has very little in this world only their dignity, and it's been a privilege to try and help these folk. It is very humbling."

PEER SUPPORT STRUCTURE

Kieran has a link to every parish in Cork and beyond. "When I'm passing an area in Cork I'm often taken back to a particular call, and I can recall that incident like it was yesterday. It could have been a challenging call or maybe just some peculiar reason that you remember that place and those people."

It could be an emotional connection. "Having a peer support structure from colleagues was really helpful. They came to the fore when you needed them. You could be dealing with calls where a child was badly injured or maybe domestic violence incidents. On one shift you could come across a lot.

"Building a relationship with people on call-outs was special. Often, they'd welcome a listening ear and the reassurance and care you brought to them. They really appreciated your help."

AEROMEDICAL SERVICE

He spent a couple of years stationed in West Cork and was a flight paramedic on a helicopter operating from Custume Barracks in Athlone. For five years he worked with the Irish Air Corps on board Ireland's first Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS).

"I have answered an emergency call in every county in Ireland." Kieran travelled near and far in his quest to aid the elderly, the lonely, people who suffered cardiac arrests, strokes, asthma attacks and road accidents, as well as farm accidents.

"I remember witnessing the bravery of an elderly farmer in the West of Ireland protecting his son who had been gored by a bullock. The elderly dad stepped in front of the animal to protect his son which was very brave of him."

Kieran stepped in for everyone who needed his help. "I flew a retired nurse to hospital who was having a heart attack. She was unselfishly concerned about her husband who was ill at home."

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

He has spread his own wings during his illustrious career. "I

was part of a teaching partnership which involved several trips to Sudan." He honoured his colleagues when he travelled abroad.

"I undertook a 600-mile cycle in the USA, honouring paramedics who were killed in the line of duty. I also had the opportunity to present my research on 'Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest' in Spain and China." He learnt his skills from the best. "I have always tried to engage and learn from colleagues nationally and internationally in trying to develop emergency care."

Most of Kieran's work has been spent with ambulance stations in Cork, where he was privileged to end up as Operations Resource Manager in his native Cork City. "I've witnessed a huge transformation in the organisation since I joined originally as an ambulance driver, with significant involvement in education and training.

"Equipment, technology and the increasing array of medications has contributed hugely to the capabilities of today's paramedics in dealing with medical and traumatic emergencies; in areas such as pain relief and, for example, the ability to recognise and deal with heart attacks, seizures and cardiac arrest."

Kieran says his career afforded him both fantastic experience and opportunity. "The education and training courses were hugely rewarding in helping me to do my job." So, how does he feel about handing in his uniform for the last time? "I have mixed emotions. I am glad I contributed and that I had such a rewarding career.

"It has been a great pleasure to work with so many great colleagues in the ambulance service, other emergency services and the greater healthcare system. I have enjoyed many experiences and I have learnt so much."

So, what next for the frontline paramedic? "I love anything to do with the outdoors, wellbeing and the arts. Hopefully I can work more on my creativity. That would be great."

"Now it's time to move on and I'm delighted to be taking up a position with UCC, the academic partners to the National Ambulance Service. I look forward to sharing my experiences and learning with the next generation of paramedics coming through."

(Source: interview with Chris Dunne, EchoLive.ie, on 12 January 2021)

HBO THERAPY TAKES OXYGEN TO HIGHER LEVEL

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy is a medical treatment that biologically repairs and regenerates human tissue by increasing tissue oxygen levels to produce long-term therapeutic benefits for a variety of conditions.

Normally, oxygen is almost exclusively carried by red blood cells. However, during HBO therapy, there is a substantial increase in the levels of oxygen carried in all body fluids including plasma, cerebrospinal fluid, lymph, and intracellular fluids. This allows increased oxygen levels even in areas with poor or compromised blood supply as well as in areas of tissue damage.

Patients who receive HBO therapy may enter a one-person clear acrylic chamber, where they breathe 100% oxygen delivered to the chamber under increased atmospheric pressure, according to Desmond Quigley, Facilities Director at the National Hyperbaric Centre in Dublin.

HBO Therapy treats conditions such as:

- Diabetic Wounds
- Radiation Tissue Damage
- Osteomyelitis (Refractory)
- Skin Grafts and Flaps (Compromised)
- Necrotising Soft Tissue Infections
- Thermal Burns
- Crush Injury and Acute Traumatic Conditions
- Air or Gas Embolism
- Carbon Monoxide & Cyanide Poisoning
- Smoke Inhalation
- Severe Anaemia

"During the treatment, which typically last 1½ to 2 hours, patients relax, may watch television or sleep while they are carefully monitored by highly-trained technicians with whom they can communicate easily through an intercom system.



"Hyperbaric oxygen treatments, which are approved by the FDA and AMA, are safe and painless, although approximately five per cent of patients (typically those who report ear pain during flights) may experience mild ear discomfort," he added.

Increasing tissue oxygen levels produces several important long-term therapeutic benefits including enhanced growth of new blood vessels, increased ability of white blood cells to destroy bacteria and remove toxins, increase growth of fibroblasts (cells involved in wound healing), and enhanced metabolic activity of previously marginally functioning cells including brain neurons.



HBOT & Recompression Chambers in Ireland

- 1. Bandon Hyperbaric Oxygen Centre**, Town Hall, Bandon, Co. Cork. Ph. 023-8843677.
- 2. East Antrim MS Therapy Centre**, Unit 24, Ledcom Ind. Est., Bank Road Lane, Co. Antrim BT4 3AW. Ph. 028-28274670; Contact: Joanne McAuley.
- 3. MS Therapy Centre**, Manorlands, Trim, Co. Meath. Ph. 046-9436474. Contact: Angela.
- 4. Newry and Mourne MS Therapy Centre**, Shepherds Way, Carnbane Industrial Estate, Newry. Ph. 028-30263301.
- 5. MS Therapy Centre**, Ballytrivnan, Co. Sligo. Ph. 071-9144748. Contact: Tamara Gormley.
- 6. University College Hospital Galway (UCHG) Recompression Chambers**; Ph. 091-524222; A new Chamber for Decompression Injuries and Carbon Monoxide poisoning only open since 26 January. Contact: Pauline Whyte; e-mail: docwhyte@hotmail.com
- 7. The National Hyperbaric Centre**, 53-54 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1, offers both Recompression (10 Person) and Therapeutic (11 person) Chambers. Ph. 01-8733044, email hyperinfo@eircom.net website: www.hyperbaricireland.com
- 8. Craigavon Hospital**, Northern Ireland has a new chamber for Decompression Injury only.
- 9. RAMS Therapy Centre**, Unit 94 City Business Park, The Cutts, Dunmurry, BT17 9HU, Northern Ireland. Ph. 028-90622936; e-mail: info@ramsni.com; website: www.ramsni.com.
- 10. Oxygeneration Ltd**, Merchant's Road, Galway, Ph. 091-562875.

ADAPTING EMERGENCY SERVICES TO COVID-19

Transformational change in the emergency services, driven by challenges presented by Covid-19 and the fast pace of technical innovation rolled out to the sector, is set to be a major theme of The Emergency Services Show, which is set to return to Birmingham's NEC on 7 and 8 September.

While it's too early to fully assess the impacts of COVID on the emergency services, the pandemic has unquestionably been an unprecedented driver for change, according to David Brown, Event Director of the Emergency Services Show (ESS).

"The Emergency Services Show uniquely brings together the many and diverse ways in which emergency services, their partners and supply chain are adapting during the pandemic. It's the one place where you can see the latest equipment, explore innovative technologies, share experiences, exchange best practice and learn from each other."

The show has launched a new feature – 'Future Policing', supported by an Advisory Council and will be chaired by the former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Lord Hogan-Howe.

Showcasing the latest innovations available for the police sector and sponsored by Audax, 'Future Policing' has the full backing of the Police Federation of England and Wales and will feature a CPD-accredited high-level conference with a line-up of senior speakers.

'Health & Wellbeing' is the exclusive focus of one of the show's four dedicated CPD-accredited seminar theatres, alongside 'Lessons Learnt and Emerging Technologies'.



The wide scope of exhibitors and delegates who attended the ESS 2019 at the NEC in Birmingham.

The fourth seminar theatre will focus on one of the fastest growing areas of innovation in the emergency services sector.

FOCUS ON HEALTH & WELLBEING

'Health & Wellbeing' topics explored will include tackling historically neglected health and safety issues and the unique mental health challenges facing the emergency services working under the pandemic.

The 'Emerging Technologies' seminar theatre will showcase how the emergency services can use data and technology more efficiently, including overcoming the organisational challenges presented by the pandemic. The College of Paramedics CPD seminars are also set to return with a programme of 30-minute workshops.

The Emergency Services Show will again feature more than 450 exhibitors, including leading names in search and rescue, extrication, training, protective clothing and uniforms, medical equipment, vehicles and fleet, vehicle equipment, outsourcing and safety.

New technology on display will include connected vehicles that serve as mobile communications hubs, satellite communications, mobile computers, tablets and phones, data, cloud storage, wearable tech, connectivity, UAVs/drones, hybrid and electric vehicles, body-worn cameras and other video capture systems.

VIRTUAL REALITY TECHNOLOGY

With the pandemic limiting opportunities for face-to-face training, Virtual Reality (VR) technology is also set to feature strongly, as is the use of other online technologies like Zoom and Microsoft Teams for training.

Enabling ICT applications to be showcased include control room systems, data management, mobile apps for emergency service and public use and the multiple technologies now being used to speed and aid collaboration.

The Emergency Services Show is working closely with the NEC to ensure visitors enjoy a safe and secure visit, in line with the event industry's All Secure Standard risk-assessment-based framework of COVID-19 secure industry best practice and guidance.

The NEC Venue Protect programme has put in place comprehensive social distancing measures and enhanced cleaning and sanitisation and supports testing and tracing.



For more information visit www.emergencyuk.com

FIRE SERVICE PUTS BRAKES ON COVID-19 AGREEMENT

UK fire and rescue service employers have unilaterally scrapped a ground-breaking agreement with the Fire Brigades Union, which had enabled firefighters to assist the NHS and care sector response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Negotiations over health and safety measures for firefighters delivering high-risk Covid-19 duties were ongoing when the national employers issued a communication ending the agreement on 13 January.

The decision appears to have been supported by the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) without any prior notice to firefighters or the Fire Brigades Union (FBU).

The FBU says the termination is driven by the employers' desire to alter previously agreed safety arrangements, which protected firefighters undertaking additional work. Under the agreement, firefighters were required to submit a negative Covid-19 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test before returning to their fire station on normal duties, protecting the service from mass outbreaks by removing the risk of cross contamination.

However, in talks the national employers attempted to remove this protection at a national level. Working over the Christmas and New Year period, the union had offered a range of alternative safety measures to enable the activities to proceed safely, but these were rejected by employers.

The employers then unilaterally withdrew from the agreement, and as a result, there is now no national protection for firefighters delivering Covid-19 duties, according to the FBU.

FBU General Secretary Matt

Wrack said that "this irresponsible move from fire and rescue service employers" threatens to endanger the lives of firefighters, their families and the public.

"The FBU has consistently worked with employers and fire chiefs in good faith to enable firefighters to safely take on new work to help their communities through this pandemic. However, employers have decided to begin a race to the bottom on safety, abdicating their responsibility to keep their staff safe, and services protected from mass outbreaks."

KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFE

Firefighters, represented by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), have taken on numerous additional Covid-related activities during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 to assist in keeping communities safe.

This agreement was originally established through a tripartite mechanism involving the FBU, the fire service national employers and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

The FBU is now urging fire and rescue service national employers to get back around the table so that the national agreement can be reintroduced in full.

"Rather than showing support for firefighters' life-saving work, employers have walked away from the very agreement which enabled it. By removing national safety standards, they are exposing staff



Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary, urges employers to reintroduce national safety protections.

and services to a deadly disease. We strongly urge them to reintroduce vital national safety protections and resume talks," Wrack noted.

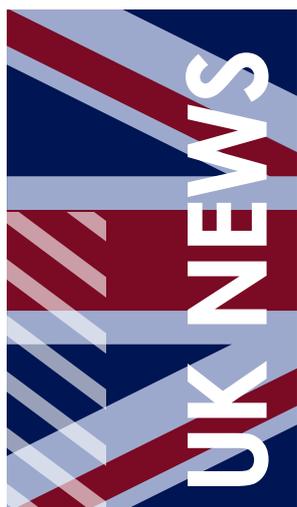
Frances O'Grady, TUC General Secretary, said: "Firefighters are making a huge contribution to fighting the pandemic - helping the vulnerable, driving ambulances and supporting NHS and care services, but safety comes first.

"The consequences of Covid-19 running rampant through a local fire station and communities are too grim to contemplate. None of us know when we might need to make a 999 call. By turning their back on the national safety agreement, employers and fire chiefs are turning their back on us all. They must get back to the negotiating table."



NFCC data shows that since March 2020, UK firefighters have:

- Delivered 125,000 essential items to vulnerable people;
- Fitted 7,370 NHS and clinical face masks;
- Assembled more than 68,000 single use face masks;
- Trained 273 people to drive ambulances;
- Transferred 1,456 COVID patients to and from hospital;
- Moved 3,196 bodies.



KNIGHT TO SHED LIGHT ON IMPACT OF GRENFELL TOWER FIRE TRAGEDY

Major issues surrounding the 'Impact of the Grenfell Tower Fire on Building Safety and Building Regulations' will be presented during a special online lecture on 25 March by Sir Ken Knight.

Following the fire at the 24-storey Grenfell Tower on 14 June 2017, in which 72 people tragically lost their lives, the Government appointed Sir Ken Knight to chair the Independent Expert Advisory Panel. The role of the Expert Panel, which is ongoing, is to recommend the necessary actions to ensure that people are safe in high-rise residential flats.

His online presentation will piece together the 'jigsaw' of what has happened since the fire and outline the proposals for the future. These will include the Government's response including a Building Safety Regulator, a Construction Products Regulator, The Building Safety Bill and The Fire Safety Bill.

Knight is keen to use his presentation to set the scene on the current and future practices and will encourage participants to engage in questions and discussion regarding the very challenging issues that have arisen due to the fire.

Sir Ken Knight's fire service career, which includes the post of Commissioner of the London Fire Brigade, spanned over 40 years, before he was appointed as the Government's Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser from 2007-2013.

For details and registration of this event, organised and promoted by the Worshipful Company of Firefighters, visit www.wcoff.org/lecture.



The UK Government has appointed Sir Ken Knight to chair the Independent Expert Advisory Panel on the Grenfell Tower Fire.

LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE AND MET POLICE JOIN FORCES TO FIGHT THE PANDEMIC

A new blue light partnership between London Ambulance Service and Metropolitan Police Service will see police officers across London driving ambulances and assisting medics to help boost the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has agreed to provide around 75 police officers to London Ambulance Service (LAS). The new partnership will help LAS to continue to put more ambulances on the road responding to Londoners that need them.

The officers, who began training on 13 January, are trained in blue light driving, have basic first aid skills and know the streets of London well, making them the ideal partners to assist the ambulance service during this period of unprecedented demand.

Garrett Emmerson, Chief Executive of London Ambulance Service, said, "Partnership working with our emergency services colleagues is an essential part of our response to the pandemic and will help us to reach more patients during this difficult time. We are also training more London Fire Brigade firefighters, whose support since April 2020 has been invaluable."

Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Dame Cressida Dick, said that although only 75 drivers were required initially, hundreds of volunteers came forward.

"London Ambulance Service is in quite severe difficulties

with servicing all the calls that they have at the moment because of the tremendous pressures brought by the COVID virus," she said.

"They asked whether we might be able to assist – I had dozens of volunteers and we have 75 officers who are assisting the paramedics as they go about their daily business. They are skilled police drivers, they're good decision makers and I'm really pleased that we are able to help the LAS at this incredibly difficult time in this way."

The police officers from the Met received the training alongside up to 80 London Fire Brigade firefighters and around 40 staff from private ambulance providers.



Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Dame Cressida Dick (centre), visited the training programmes at Wembley Stadium in January.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE STEPS UP PROTECTION AGAINST COVID-19

Essex & Herts Air Ambulance (EHAAT) is taking additional steps to protect patients and crew members from COVID-19 by decontaminating crews and equipment with specially-prepared water containing salt and electricity, which instantly kills 99.99% of bacteria, fungi and viruses.

A dry 'fog' created from electrolysed saline water is released inside a tent, into which anything that needs treating is placed. The environmentally-friendly system is non-toxic, non-corrosive and leaves no harmful residues. Electrolysed water is not new technology. It is used in the food industry and for water treatment.

EHAAT's crews are using the fogging system at the end of every shift, and after every mission, at the charity's airbases at North Weald and Earls Colne. Stuart Elms, EHAAT's Clinical Director, said, "I'm delighted that we can add this extra layer of decontamination to our strong measures of infection prevention and control. We will continue to look for ways to increase the safety of our patients and crews."

The charity is working to keep patients, staff, volunteers and supporters safe and has been working with the East of England NHS Ambulance Trust to ensure EHAAT's frontline patient-facing staff are all vaccinated against the virus.

Since the start of the year EHAAT has been assisting



Irish medic Dr Lisa Guthrie pictured inside the EHAAT's decontamination tent.

the transfer of some COVID-19 patients between hospitals, while continuing to respond to the charity's normal workload of medical emergencies, cardiac arrests, road traffic collisions, serious injuries etc.

When required, the team, based at the charity's North Weald Airbase, travel by helicopter or Rapid Response Vehicle (RRV) to the relevant hospital, and accompany the patient in a designated land ambulance to the receiving hospital. The EHAAT team is able to provide the advanced level of care that allows a safe transfer of this group of patients.

AMBULANCE CREWS GIVEN BODY CAMERAS FOR GREATER PROTECTION

London ambulance crews have started wearing body cameras to protect them from violent assaults and threats, and the new is being rolled out as part of a trial, starting in areas where London Ambulance Service staff and volunteers are considered to be most at risk, based on previous incidents.

Medics can press a button to start recording if patients or members of the public become aggressive or abusive. Emergency ambulance crew member Gary Watson (pictured), who is based at Croydon Ambulance Station, will be among the first people to wear one.



Watson, who was violently assaulted by a drunk patient three years ago, said: "We get up every day to help people, not to be severely beaten. Wearing these cameras should act as a deterrent and if it doesn't then at least there will be evidence which will hopefully mean tougher sentences for criminals."

He suffered a torn ligament and serious injuries to his face, throat and neck in the attack in January 2018. Two other medics were also injured while a fourth medic was badly shaken. A man was found guilty but only given a suspended sentence.

Latest figures from London Ambulance Service revealed that there were 529 violent incidents between April 2020 and January 2021. Those attacks included kicking, punching, head-butting, biting and spitting and there were also 31 assaults with weapons.

Meanwhile, during the same period, there were 834 incidents of verbal abuse and threats. There are concerns that many more incidents go unreported, despite a campaign to encourage staff and volunteers to report all abuse.

As well as the cameras, London Ambulance Service has recruited two violence reduction officers and launched the #NotPartoftheJob campaign, as part of its ongoing work to protect staff and volunteers. So far this year, 27 people have been successfully prosecuted for attacks on ambulance staff – 18 of those were jailed.

TURNTABLE LADDERS ROLLED OUT IN WALES!

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service (MAWWFRS) has upgraded its aerial rescue provisions, with three new Turntable Ladders now in operation at Morryston, Aberystwyth and Haverfordwest fire stations.

Group Manager Ricky Woodhead said: "During 2020, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service undertook a project to replace the two aerial rescue platforms, based at Swansea West and Haverfordwest, and one Turntable Ladder, stationed at Aberystwyth, with three brand new turntable ladders.

"As part of the project, and following careful consideration and extensive consultation, the new Turntable Ladder that is allocated to our Swansea Command Area has been relocated to Morryston Fire Station.

"The replacement and upgrade of our aerial rescue provision is an essential step for MAWWFRS to become a world leader in emergency response and to better protect the communities of mid and west Wales."



DOCTORS CALL FOR ACTION AS COVID HITS NHS WORKFORCE

The number of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers falling ill with Covid-19 has reached crisis levels and is seriously hampering the fight against the rapidly escalating pandemic, the British Medical Association (BMA) has warned.

The problem of staff absence, because of illness or the need to self-isolate when family members test positive, is also beginning to hamper the vaccination programme.

In a letter to members, BMA chair Chaand Nagpaul noted: "There are over 46,000 hospital staff off sick with Covid-19, heaping additional pressure on an already overstretched workforce struggling to manage even current critical care demand."

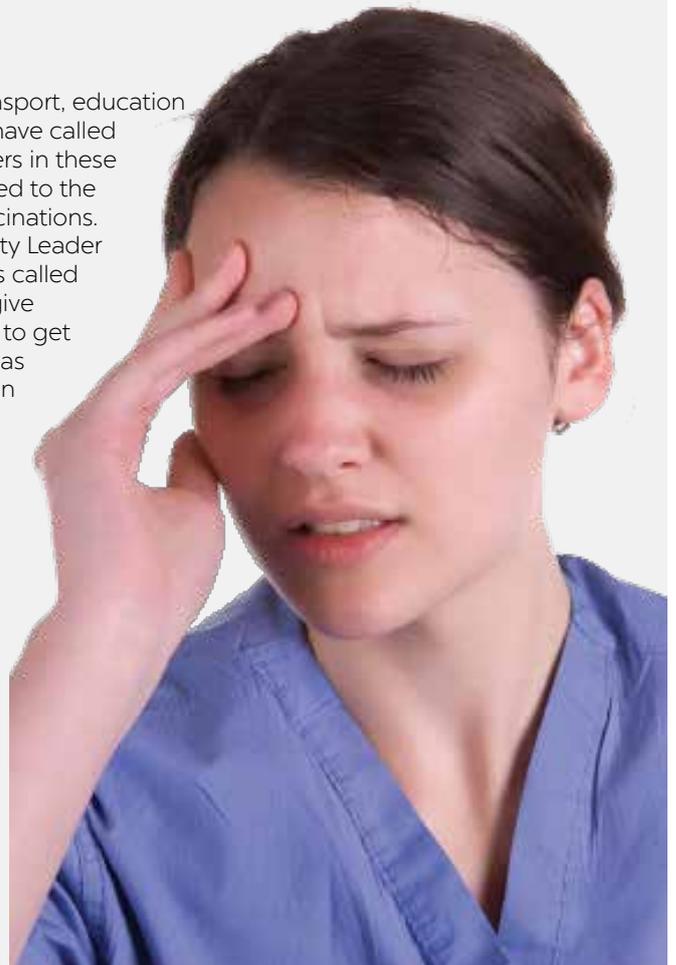
Stressing the need for doctors and other health workers to be vaccinated as soon as possible, Dr Nagpaul added: "It is only if the NHS workforce is kept fit and well that we will be able to meet the unprecedented surge in demand that the coming weeks and months will bring as well as delivering the vaccine programme that remains our only hope to end this dreadful

pandemic."

Workers in transport, education and retail unions have called for essential workers in these sectors to be added to the priority list for vaccinations.

Labour's Deputy Leader Angela Rayner has called on employers to give staff paid time off to get the vaccine. She has written to five main business groups to request that they ease the process of workers getting the job.

The letter was sent to the Confederation of Business Industry, the British Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors and MakeUK.



NATIONAL POLICE AIR SERVICE TESTS POTENTIAL OF ISRAEL'S DRONE TECHNOLOGY

The National Police Air Service (NPAS) has evaluated remotely-piloted aircraft technology, in partnership with Israel's international defence electronics company Elbit Systems, to research the use of its drones for police forces in England and Wales.



In doing so the NPAS is seeking to explore how this technology might be used to deliver public safety in support of the police forces of England and Wales in future.

The trial included a series of simulated typical police aviation scenarios currently fulfilled by the existing national fleet of helicopters and aeroplanes in support of the 43 police forces of England and Wales and British Transport Police.

Captain Ollie Dismore, NPAS Director of Flight Operations, said that with continuous advances in UAV capabilities, UK policing seeks "to explore the viability of platforms such as these for possible future use in delivering police air support nationally".

Currently serviced by their national mixed fleet of helicopters and aeroplanes, Dismore added that "police forces require us to embrace innovation and make use of advancing technology, including seizing opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint.

"If this technology enables us to fulfil our national remit more efficiently and either as or more effectively than with our current assets, then it will be considered as part of a future national police air service fleet."

POLICE USE OF FORENSIC MARKERS RESULTS IN 69% DROP IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENTS

Police forces are working with risk management company SmartWater Group to fight domestic abuse and help victims feel safer, following the increase in UK domestic violence during lockdown, due to victims being trapped in their homes with their abusers.

To help this UK wide situation, SmartWater's forensic marking liquid, which has traditionally been used to deter

offences of theft and burglary, is now being used to protect victims of domestic abuse.

One police force that is already seeing results from this new initiative is South Yorkshire Police, where they are seeing a 69% reduction in reported incidents and a 94% reduction in harm from those incidents reported.

The police are remaining tight-lipped on the various methods they are using to deploy SmartWater at the time of an incident but perpetrators who are marked with SmartWater will be forensically linked to the scene of the crime. This is helping the police to build a strong evidence case against them in circumstances that can often be difficult to prove.

Lee Berry, Detective Chief Inspector for South Yorkshire Police, added: "We've seen significant reductions in relation to repeat offences, that's dropped, up to 69% less offence has been recorded, but significantly what we're pleased about is, that those people we are protecting feel more safe and they've got more confidence in the police as well."

SMARTWATER GROUP

Forensic Marking

Police use of SMARTWATER produces a 69% reduction in domestic violence incidents

SMARTWATER

smartwater.com

MEDICS CLAIM ACTION IS NEEDED AS COVID-19 HITS NHS WORKFORCE



The number of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers who are falling ill with Covid-19 has reached crisis levels and is seriously hampering the fight against the rapidly escalating pandemic, the British Medical Association (BMA) has warned.

The problem of staff absence, due to illness or the need to self-isolate when family members test positive, is also beginning to hamper the vaccination programme.

There are over 46,000 hospital staff off sick with Covid-19, heaping additional pressure on an already overstretched workforce struggling to manage even current critical care demand, according to BMA chair Chand Nagpaul.

"It is only if the NHS workforce is kept fit and well, can we meet the unprecedented surge in demand, as well as delivering the vaccine programme, which remains our only hope to end this dreadful pandemic," he added.

Transport, education and retail unions have also called for essential workers in these sectors to be added to the priority list for vaccinations.

PATIENTS TESTED FOR COVID-19 BEFORE HOSPITAL TRANSFER IN PIONEERING STUDY

Paramedics at South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) are testing patients for COVID-19 at home – including those without symptoms – if they require transfer to hospital, as part of a pioneering initiative designed to speed up handovers and release crews more quickly.

Currently, lateral flow tests, which are used to detect the virus in people with no symptoms who could be highly infectious, are only used when patients – transferred by ambulance without confirmed COVID-19 arrive at hospital in locations such as emergency departments and maternity assessment units.

The pilot study will see lateral

flow tests administered by a trained ambulance crew to patients on the decision to transfer them to hospital, with the trial involving all patients over 18 – with or without symptoms – due for transfer to Oxford University Hospitals. The process will ensure a patient has test results on or very soon after arrival to inform secondary care clinicians which COVID-19 care pathway should be followed.

"This is a small study to begin with in Oxford, so it will not happen with every patient transfer across SCAS. However, further rollout to a wider area will be considered if the concept is proved through the pilot and there is sufficient access to lateral flow devices," noted Dr John



Black, Medical Director at South Central Ambulance Service.

EMERGENCY VOLUNTEER NETWORK ROLL OUT LIFESAVING VEHICLE

A network of volunteer medical staff who give up their free time to support the North West Ambulance Service in emergency incidents has launched a new BMW Rapid Response Vehicle.

Cheshire and Shropshire Immediate Care Group (CSI BASICS) successfully applied for a £50,000 grant from the British Association for Immediate Care. This comes from an annual donation of £250,000 by the County Air Ambulance HELP Appeal to support the work of groups affiliated to the association who provide voluntary immediate care services across the UK.



Despite COVID, the number of volunteers continues to grow. It currently has nine responders, supported by a further eight volunteers, who keep the charity running.

Robert Bertram, Chief Executive of the County Air Ambulance HELP Appeal, described the volunteers as "the unsung heroes of emergency care". He said that this addition to their fleet of cars is in recognition of their lifesaving work – "all carried out in their spare time – supporting local ambulance crews faced with hugely complex incidents, where people's lives are at serious risk".

UNIFIL PEACEKEEPERS SUPPORT SOUTHERN LEBANON'S FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

With a rise in the number of COVID-19 cases in Lebanon recently, UNIFIL peacekeepers have ramped up support to the host communities in Southern Lebanon in their fight against the virus.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, UNIFIL peacekeepers have offered various types of support to local communities as they strived to prevent the spread of the virus.

UNIFIL peacekeepers from Ghana, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Nepal and Spain have offered a wide range of support to deal with the ongoing health emergency affecting the communities within their areas of responsibility.

The support, targeted at boosting local capabilities, covered three of four main districts within the UNIFIL mission's 1,060 sq. km area of operations – Tyre, Bint Jbeil and Marjayoun. These districts host several hospitals – important referral centres for the management of COVID-19 cases. These areas have been particularly hard-hit by the virus.

Most of the donations consisted of much-needed medical consumables, such as masks, PPE and suits, sanitary liquid, thermometers, and foot-operated sanitiser dispensers.

In addition, Italy also donated three innovative laryngoscopy video systems, capable of viewing clear and real-time images of a patient's airways, to the public hospitals of Bint Jbeil and Tibnin and to the municipality of Tyre. These will help frontline medical staff diagnose and

treat serious cases more quickly.

Likewise, Korean peacekeepers also donated multivitamins, which are in short supply in Lebanon, to schoolchildren. They also donated generator sets to the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL's strategic partners, to enhance their emergency response capacity.



UNIFIL Italian Contingent has donated three innovative laryngoscopy video systems to the Lebanese public hospitals of Bint Jbeil and Tibnin and to the municipality of Tyre. (UN Photo/Sergeant Marina Dore)

EUROPOL WARNS OF GANGS SELLING FAKE CLEAR VIRUS TESTS TO EU TRAVELLERS

Criminal gangs are selling fake COVID-19 test certificates, with cases already emerging of fraudulent COVID-19 test certificates being sold to travellers, according to Europol.

Europol has said that a forgery ring selling negative test results to passengers was dismantled at the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, France. Meanwhile, in the UK, fraudsters were caught selling bogus COVID-19 documents for £100. In December 2020, a fraudster was apprehended by Spanish police for selling fake test results for €40.



Cases are emerging of fraudulent COVID-19 test certificates being sold to travellers, according to Europol.

Europol has received additional intelligence on the alleged use of a mobile application by the so-called 'Rathkeale Rovers' mobile organised crime gang, which allows members of the group to manually falsify test results.

The gang, originally from Rathkeale, Co. Limerick, are mostly based in the UK. Some gang members have previous convictions for money laundering, smuggling, drug trafficking and burglary.

"Given the widespread technological means available, in the form of high-quality printers and different software, fraudsters are able to produce high-quality counterfeit, forged or fake documents," Europol has warned.

EU member states are encouraged to share any relevant information on criminal activities related to fake COVID-19 test documentation with Europol. Many countries, including Ireland, have introduced legislation requiring proof of a recent negative test before allowing travellers into the country.

Europol believes production and sales of fake test certificates will prevail as long as travel restrictions remain in place, and it has said that passengers can pay from €150 up to €300 for a fake certificate.

CALIFORNIA HOSPITALS TO EXPAND COVID-19 TESTING FOR STAFF

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has directed general acute-care hospitals to conduct weekly COVID-19 testing of all healthcare workers and newly admitted patients, and to immediately test employees with signs or symptoms of the disease.

A CDPH letter sent to hospital employers late last year noted that “all healthcare personnel should be included in the weekly screening testing programme to maximise the strategy for prevention of outbreaks.”

Those include, but aren't limited to, nurses, emergency medical services workers, physicians, technicians, therapists, pharmacists, phlebotomists, students, trainees and contractual staff.

CDPH's recommended strategies, as informed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), include:

- Testing healthcare personnel with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- Testing asymptomatic personnel with known or suspected exposure to COVID-19.
- Testing asymptomatic personnel without known or suspected exposure to COVID-19 for early identification.



CDPH recommends hospitals which implement staff testing programmes to include policies and procedures that address the use of test results. National Nurses United has called the infection control measure a “tremendous victory” for nurses and other healthcare workers.

VACCINATION SCANDAL IN THE SPANISH ARMED FORCES

A number of high-ranking officials from the Spanish Armed Forces misused COVID-19 vaccines for military personnel engaged in operations at the end of January, according to media reports.

The scandal, which was strongly criticised by EUROMIL Spanish member association AUME, led to the resignation of the Spanish Chief of Defence, General Miguel Ángel Villarroya, to “not damage the good name and image of Spanish armed forces”.

The Spanish Armed Forces are still engaged in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and support the authorities with Operation BALUARTE, which traces contacts of people tested positive.

The Military Emergency Unit (UME) deployed its workforce to help out during the snow storm in Spain that blocked Madrid and other cities for days.

At the same time, the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is registering records of infections.

Military health personnel and other army units are setting up field hospitals preventing the foreseeable collapse of certain hospital capacity.

The roll out of vaccination in Spain has been controversial due to an insufficient injection rate of the vaccine doses received.

Some public officials have received the first shot of vaccine, skipping the priority order established in the National Vaccination Plan.

Spanish Armed Forces have received a quota of vaccines to administer to frontline personnel and others scheduled to participate in an international mission

However, the Defence General Staff (EMAD) has drawn up a vaccine administration plan that includes the generals and high-ranking officers, including the Chief of Staff.

This situation has been denounced in the media while the Defence Minister announced an investigation into the circumstances of this vaccination of personnel assigned to the EMAD.



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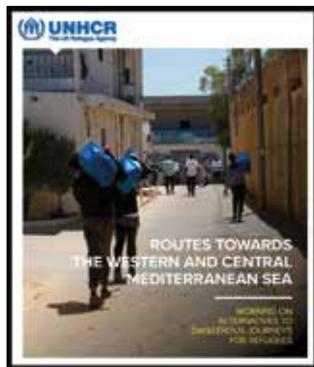
AUME published a press release showing the displeasure of military personnel for this vaccination plan of EMAD that does not respect the criteria of the national plan, which apply to all Spanish citizens without exceptions, considering that it is an unjustified privilege.

UN REFUGEE AGENCY ISSUES LIFESAVING APPEAL TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

UN Refugee Agency UNHCR is calling on the international community to do more to save the lives of refugees who take risky routes towards the Mediterranean, following the release of its 2021 strategic action plan and related funding appeal for this situation.

UNHCR is deeply worried about displacement in the East and Horn of Africa, increased sea arrivals to the Canary Islands, with over 1,060 deaths recorded in the Central and Western Mediterranean in 2020 alone. The Agency is seeking over USD\$100m to enhance refugee protection in African countries en route to the Mediterranean. Offering safe and viable alternatives to the perilous journeys marred by abuse and deaths is the critical priority.

It claims that the risks of trafficking and abuses, such as kidnap for ransom, forced labour, sexual servitude and gender-based violence at the hands of traffickers and gangs, are very likely to continue.



"We hear harrowing first-hand accounts of brutality and abuses refugees and migrants suffer along the routes towards the Mediterranean. Many

fall prey to traffickers and smugglers and are abused, extorted, raped, and sometimes killed or left to die," said Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR's Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation.

"It is critical that they receive life-saving support and protection in the countries to which they initially flee," he added. UNHCR's strategy seeks to increase outreach, identification and assistance to refugees along the route, as well as enhance access to education and livelihoods in countries of asylum. Priority is also given to protection assessments for those in remote locations, and to increased cash-based assistance to vulnerable refugees in urban settings.

UNHCR is appealing to states to strengthen safe and legal pathways for refugees, including through family reunification, and by enhancing the use of the two Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Rwanda and Niger for those evacuated from Libya.

In response to reported abuses, UNHCR also aims to broaden the support and services for survivors and facilitate better access to justice. Additional efforts to inform and alert those on the move about the risks of onward movements and services available locally will be also ramped up.

This year the Agency hopes to identify and assist more refugees along these routes and in host countries, and to strengthen access and delivery of protection for abuse survivors.

RAMBAM HEALTH CARE CAMPUS JOINS EFFORTS TO DEVELOP ISRAELI COVID-19 VACCINE

Israel currently has the highest COVID-19 vaccination rate in the world, with the vast majority of the 5,300 employees at Rambam Health Care Campus having already received two doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

The Clinical Trials Unit at Rambam Health Care Campus (in Rambam's Research & Development Unit), headed by Dr Avivit Peer, joined a group of hospitals and institutions taking part in what is defined as 'Phase 2' of the Israel Institute for Biological Research's COVID-19 vaccine development.

A spokesperson from Israel's Ministry of Defense noted that the second phase of the trial will include broad safety tests on up to 1,000 healthy volunteers aged 18 and over. "This phase is meant to complete the safety tests, identify the precise doses needed, and continue to test for effectiveness.

"It will last for several months, and its success will allow a large-scale trial to test the effectiveness of the vaccine on a larger scale, with the participation of up to 30,000 volunteers (Phase 3) in Israel and/or abroad."

Dr Peer added, "Rambam is participating in this research group for the development of an Israeli vaccine with healthy volunteers. We are very proud that our unit, which has been operating for two years in the field

of drug development research with a focus on new vaccines, has joined the cause for better health for the entire population."

Established in 1938, Rambam Health Care Campus is a 1,000-bed teaching hospital with a diverse patient population. The only tertiary referral medical centre serving the two million residents of Northern Israel, Rambam also treats patients referred from throughout Israel, the Mediterranean region and around the world.



The first volunteer who came to Rambam to receive the vaccine from the Israel Institute for Biological Research. (Photograph courtesy of Rambam Health Care Campus)