Prof Barry O’Donnell

A compassionate and listening clinician and a first-rate operating surgeon, this year’s Lifetime Achievement Award recipient has, in the past, described himself humbly as “a second-class brain with a world-class training” – and while his training in London and Boston was indeed world class, honing skills and ideas he was to bring back to Dublin, there was and still is definitely something special in this Corkman’s brain, that led him not only to develop a groundbreaking surgical procedure – for which he received a ’People of the Year’ award – but to also represent his profession on the International stage like no other Irish doctor before or since.

A graduate of UCC (1949), Prof O’Donnell worked in postgraduate posts in Winchester, Brighton, Leicester and Great Ormond Street, London. And with the Ainsworth Travelling Scholarship from UCC, he went further afield to the famous Lahey Clinic, Boston (with Dr RB Cattell and others) and the Boston Floating Hospital for Infants and Children (Dr Orvar Swenson).

When he returned to Ireland as a consultant in Crumlin in 1957 at the age of 29 – a post he held until 1993 – he was the only dedicated paediatric surgeon at the hospital for his first nine years, and recalls doing 1,100 operations in a single year.

Prof O’Donnell was uniquely President of the British, Canadian and Irish Medical Associations at the same time (1976-1977) – an honour never since repeated. He was also President of the British Association of Paediatric Surgeons and was awarded its highest honour, the Denis Browne Medal, along with the Hunterian Professorship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and the Urology Medal of the American Academy of Pediatrics — the first paediatric surgeon outside the US to be so honoured. He was also Chairman of the British Medical Journal from 1982 to 1988, and visiting professor to many US universities, including Harvard.

He was appointed the first Professor of Paediatric Surgery in Ireland in 1986 by the RCSI — a College he was also later to lead as President. During his two-year presidential term (1998-2000), he oversaw major property expansions, introduced the highly successful Mini-Med School for the public, changed many of the ways the Council did its business, and conceived the full-time post of Director of Surgical Affairs.

He ranks the founding of the National Children’s Research Centre in 1965 at Crumlin Hospital among his proudest achievements. This was the first dedicated research centre on the site of any Irish hospital. In terms of his own personal research, Prof O’Donnell’s name will always be synonymous with the innovation of endoscopic correction of vesicoureteric reflux — the Subureteric Teflon Injection, or Sting – that was developed with the help of Prof Prem Puri. The procedure was a real breakthrough: it cut a two-and-a-half-hour operation, with a 10-day hospital stay, down to just 15 minutes as a day case. In 1984, both doctors received a national ‘People of the Year’ award for their discovery. His full and eventful life has seen run-ins with Indira Gandhi and the IRA, and a ‘dice with death’ during the tragic Fastnet Race of 1979, when a worse-than-expected storm saw the loss of 18 lives.

In ‘Irish Surgeons and Surgery in the Twentieth Century’, the 2008 book edited by Prof O’Donnell, Prof Frank Keane, in the foreword, described our Lifetime Achievement Award winner as a “renaissance Bob Hope”, but at the same time someone with a “sharp political nous and commitment, scientifically sound and yet devoted to his craft”.

It is alleged that after a talk in the US when someone asked him ‘Who are you anyway?’ he replied, ‘It would take me too long to tell you.’ But if you want to learn more, visit the IMT website at bit.ly/profBOD for a full interview.
National Centre for Paediatric Rheumatology, Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin, in association with St Vincent’s University Hospital

The YARD — Young Adolescents with Rheumatic Disease

Also, winner of the Outpatient Initiative of the Year, the YARD — the Young Adolescents with Rheumatic Diseases Clinic — is a unique and seamless transitional pathway of care for adolescents and young people attending the National Centre for Paediatric Rheumatology at Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin, and established in association with St Vincent’s University Hospital, Dublin.

For young patients who have attended paediatric services for years, moving into the adult ‘system’ can be challenging. Traditionally care of adolescents is synonymously associated with a once-off ‘transfer’ as young people move from a paediatric- to an adult-based clinical setting.

So rather than moving straight into an adult clinic, patients now attend a transition clinic for a number of years where they are looked after by both paediatric and adult doctors and their teams — hence ensuring that by the time they do move into the adult service, the clinic and its staff are very familiar to them.

Planned transitional care is age-appropriate and an active, ongoing and gradual process that has been shown to result in better clinical outcomes in patients with chronic illness, such as diabetes and arthritis. Some 70 ‘discussion points’ are involved in the patients’ care plan, which are reviewed throughout their attendance. These include aspects of care such as disease knowledge and management, medications, school and education, sexual health and general health promotion.

The pathway also helps parents and carers during the gradual reduction of parental influence by allowing the young person to become more independent in their decisions and choices.

The process at Crumlin is broken up into three stages: early transition (ages 11-13), mid-transition (13-15) and late transition (15 onwards). In addition, a unique transition clinic in St Vincent’s University Hospital, Dublin for those aged 15-16 onwards commenced in 2007 to offer this combined paediatric and adult care, and from ages 20-24, young adults progress into the hospital’s Young Adult Rheumatology Clinic.

Novas Initiatives

Preventing and responding to overdose among homeless people

With an average of one overdose happening every two weeks, this research and education programme was initiated to tackle the number of overdoses among those living in McGarry House Homeless Service in Limerick City and to provide best practice response when an overdose did occur. An independent review of current practice was commissioned and carried out by Quality Matters and the University of Limerick’s Graduate Entry Medical School, and the resulting report made 14 recommendations around such areas as risk assessment and prevention, harm reduction, confidentiality, naloxone distribution, interagency protocols and training.

In the first nine months of this year, following the roll-out of the recommendations, there have been 11 overdoses — a decrease of 35 per cent, compared to the nine-month period immediately preceding the start of the project. Other elements yet to be implemented — such as a peer education programme — should reduce the numbers even further and improve the general health of individuals and enhance the lives of this at-risk group.

Novas Initiatives — which set up the State’s first low-threshold, direct-access homeless service in 2002 in Limerick — is committed to the vision and goal of ending long-term homelessness in Ireland.
Claire Kerins, Croí, the West of Ireland Cardiac Foundation

An evaluation of a menu labelling initiative in the West of Ireland

Although Ireland currently has a voluntary system for calorie menu labelling, such calorie counting can sometimes be misleading and there are known barriers to its effectiveness, particularly among the more socially deprived. This successful project from Croí thus evaluated the impact of a novel, user-friendly approach to menu labelling designed
to incentivise the provision and selection of healthier food options in restaurants, pubs and takeaways across the West of Ireland.

Carried out by Claire Kerins as part of an MA in Health Promotion, five award symbols were developed to provide a practical and user-friendly system to help guide menu selection towards healthier options, including: Cholesterol Friendly, Blood Pressure Friendly, Weight Friendly, Diabetic Friendly and an aggregate award for dishes meeting all the relevant criteria – the Healthiest Heart Award.

Following adoption by 14 food establishments, which had their menus nutritionally analysed by Croí specialist dietitians, post-analysis showed an increase in sales for the awarded menu items in all of the establishments, showing that the symbols had a positive impact on consumer buying behaviour. The scheme also encouraged the restaurants themselves to change some of their food practices to improve their food’s nutritional profile.

Sanofi Pasteur MSD, First Medical Communications & MedMedia Group

Launch of shingles and PHN vaccine Zostavax in Ireland

This public disease awareness campaign on shingles was undertaken to highlight the condition among the Irish public, as part of the introduction by Sanofi Pasteur MSD of its new shingles and post herpetic neuralgia vaccine Zostavax. Prior research had shown that over a third of Irish adults had either never heard of the viral disease or knew nothing about it.

Targeting healthcare professionals as well as the over-50s, the campaign, on the one hand, created awareness among doctors through traditional advertising, PR and numerous medical meetings of the availability of the new shingles vaccine, so they could consider vaccinating their at-risk patients. On the other hand, as the company was restricted from mentioning to a non-medical audience that a vaccine was available, the challenge was to raise awareness of shingles among the public and connect this at-risk demographic with their GP.

Through radio infomercials, design and print materials, PR, online advertising, medical press adverts and inserts, as well as a new disease information website (www.shingles.ie) with integrated risk calculator, the multi-channel campaign, which recruited former Minister Mary O’Rourke as a celebrity ambassador was estimated to have been viewed/listened to almost 10 million times. More than 2,000 people entered personal details into the website via the risk calculator, and of these more than 1,200 were at high risk of shingles.
**Best Patient Education Project — Pharmaceutical**

FleishmanHillard & Janssen

*Man to Man: Irish stories of hope in prostate cancer*

‘Man to Man’ is a resource comprised of individual real-life stories of men with prostate cancer, which is designed to offer hope and support to other men living with the disease in Ireland. Developed by Janssen, in association with the Irish Cancer Society, the storybook profiles 11 men from various walks of life – including a lorry driver, a priest and a politician – who candidly share their personal experience of prostate cancer, some identified – like Willie Penrose TD – others through pseudonyms. They touch on some very sensitive and personal information, such as their diagnosis, treatments, coping mechanisms and importantly side-effects like erectile dysfunction and incontinence, which are often ignored due to embarrassment.

With more than 3,000 men newly diagnosed with prostate cancer in Ireland each year, and 500 dying from the disease annually, the book was produced to promote greater psychological supports for the estimated 17,000 men currently living with the illness. As Deputy Penrose writes in the book: “A problem shared, really is a problem halved.”

**Commendation**

A commendation in this category went to the Irish Cancer Society (ICS) and Eli Lilly and Co Ireland for their successful ‘Lung Cancer Awareness Campaign’, which purposely moved away from the grim, grey, tobacco-led and often frightening messages and imagery that tend to be associated with lung cancer to a more positive campaign encouraging people to be proactive and to contact the ICS’s information services.

**Outpatient Initiative of the Year**

National Centre for Paediatric Rheumatology, Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin, in association with St Vincent’s University Hospital

*The YARD: Young Adolescents with Rheumatic Disease*

Also winner of the main prize, *An Duais Mhór*. The YARD — the Young Adolescents with Rheumatic Diseases Clinic — is a unique and seamless transitional pathway of care for adolescents and young people attending the National Centre for Paediatric Rheumatology at Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin, and established in association with St Vincent’s University Hospital, Dublin. Under the scheme, young patients attend a transition clinic for a number of years where they are looked after by both paediatric and adult doctors and their teams – hence ensuring that by the time they do move into the adult service, the clinic and its staff are very familiar to them.

**Outpatient Initiative of the Year Award. (L-r): Julie Murphy, Commercial Director of Award Sponsors Mylan/ Gerhard Laboratories; Dr Orla Killeen; and Derek Deely**

**Commendations**

Two commendations were also awarded in this category, the first of which went to the Heartbeat Trust for its ‘Community-based new diagnostic clinic for heart failure’. The new pathway was established to reduce time to diagnosis for people with a possible diagnosis of heart failure and to provide diagnostics and clinics in the local community – in GPs’ surgeries in Gorey, Co Wexford – while at the same time reducing overall costs. All of these objectives have been successfully achieved by the team, led by Prof Ken McDonald.

The second commendation went to the ‘Arrive on Time, Reduce the Line: Coombe Antenatal Clinic Lean Project’ from the Coombe Women’s and Infants, University Hospital and MCO Projects. Implemented using the Lean Six Sigma framework, the project – which involved a new restricted check-in solution, shorter and more frequent slots, new signage, and a pre-booking schedule, among other measures – has achieved a 25 per cent reduction in overall patient experience times (PET) for standard antenatal patients, or a reduction of 28 minutes; an improved staff working environment; and new internal KPIs for PET, which are now reported on monthly at Division meeting – all of which have alleviated congestion and greatly reduced patient stress.
**Lactation Team, National Maternity Hospital & UCD**

An exploration of the experiences of mothers as they suppress lactation following late miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death

This research paper, written following an MSc research study withbereaved mothers carried out by Denise McGuinness, examined the experiences of mothers as they suppressed lactation following late miscarriage (>20 weeks), stillbirth or neonatal death and led to the publication of a breast care leaflet by the National Maternity Hospital, in association with the Irish Hospice Foundation, to support all bereaved mothers in Ireland following the loss of a baby. Published in June in *Evidence Based Midwifery* (EBM 12(2):65-70), the research journal of the Royal College of Midwives, the study found that in the midst of a mother grieving the loss of her baby, sore and engorged breasts compounded this grief experience and could be one of the most distressing physical symptoms.

The study demonstrated the importance of the midwife addressing the emotional and physical aspects of the suppression of lactation with a grieving mother, and the need for practical information – on such issues as coping with engorgement, reducing milk supply, and milk donation – to be provided both in a verbal and written format.

**Best Use of Information Technology**

**Notochord**

The Irish Prescribing Index

The Irish Prescribing Index (IPI) is an online, fully automated prescribing analytics platform that enables GPs to monitor and audit their prescribing patterns for the benefit of both their public and private patients.

To ensure the GP complies with best practice and avoids their prescribing habits becoming just that — a ‘habit’ — the IPI allows the doctor to benchmark anonymously where their practice’s prescribing ranks compared to the average of other practices on the platform. Since launching earlier this year, the IPI has grown at a phenomenal rate — from having just 10 practices signed up in May, to more than 200 by mid-August.

Notochord — which has set up a support team of experts to answer queries and allow GPs to feedback their experiences and outcomes — hopes to have more than half of all GP practices using the Index to monitor their prescribing by the end of the year.

The secure site also now allows GPs to share and comment on their colleagues’ searches if they wish, so that a ‘community of practice’ can emerge to share ideas and experiences in the area of best practice prescribing.
Best Hospital Project

As we know, the earlier stroke thrombolytic therapy is given in acute ischaemic stroke the better the functional outcomes for the patient. The Mater project has led directly to a dramatic reduction in the overall Door-to-Needle (DTN) times for patients receiving thrombolytic therapy for acute stroke symptoms. Since the new streamlined Acute Stroke Thrombolysis Pathway was first implemented in March, the median DTN time is 63 minutes – significantly less (21 per cent) than the 80 minutes recorded last year. The median Door-to-CT time is now 24 minutes, which represents a 49 per cent reduction, while the CT-to-Needle time is 39 minutes.

For cases presenting during normal working hours only, the DTN time is 45 minutes — well within published international guidelines – while the Door-to-CT and CT-to-Needle times are down to 11 and 29 minutes, respectively. The previous out-of-hours median DTN time of 84 minutes (2007-2013) has been reduced to 69 minutes, and work is ongoing to reduce this further to below 60 minutes. With two million brain cells dying every minute the decision to thrombolise is delayed, the Mater team estimate than an average of approximately 34 million brain cells have been saved per patient as a result of its Door-to-Needle project.

Best Patient Education Project — Non Pharmaceutical

A first of its kind in Ireland, the bee-keeping project from the National Forensic Mental Health Service was established primarily for its potential therapeutic benefits for patients at the Central Mental Hospital (CMH). After staff themselves trained with the Federation of Irish Beekeepers Association (FIBKA), an apiary was constructed and the hives colonised in July 2013. Ten weeks of lectures from a visiting expert then followed early in 2014, with 12 patients and eight staff sitting an exam that May. Practical instruction on the maintenance of hives, disease prevention and harvesting of honey were then provided, the decision to thrombolise is delayed, the Mater team estimate than an average of approximately 34 million brain cells have been saved per patient as a result of its Door-to-Needle project.
Department of Social Protection
Closed Certification Guidelines for General Practitioners

With the number of people on long-term illness/disability schemes having increased from 100,000 to 150,000 over the past 10 years, and the cost increasing from €700 million to €1.8 billion, there was an obvious need to take a different approach to the current ‘open-end’ illness certification system, which medical assessors at the Department of Social Protection believed could result in better outcomes for patients, decreased healthcare costs, reduced absen-
teesim and significant savings in long-term illness benefit schemes.

These radically new ‘Closed Certification Guidelines’ were thus devised as a tool to assist GPs in the appropriate certification of patients, by outlining the expected durations of recovery for a range of common medical conditions covering approximately 80 per cent of those involved in new illness claims – while stressing that the tool is not pre-
scriptive and that the clinical judgement of the GP should always prevail.

To determine their effectiveness, a follow-up study of the guidelines was carried out. It found that the vast major-
ity of GPs surveyed (89 per cent) viewed the guidelines as being a help with certifying patients, eight out of 10 felt the tool resulted in better health outcomes for some of their patients, while three-quarters said it resulted in a faster return to work for some. More than 80 per cent thought that Closed Certification should be rolled out nationally.

EXCELLENCE IN HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT

HSE South/Cork ISA Community Services
Cork Primary & Community Care Home Support Management Model

This new home support service management model was designed to facilitate and manage the timely discharge of patients from the acute setting in the Cork area, where more than 6,000 individuals are in receipt of a home help service from over 2,000 home help staff employed by the HSE. Among various measures introduced by an additional protocol called the Interim Home Support Process (iHSP) was an email notification service in respect of patients likely to need home support on discharge from all Cork hospitals. Locally held and managed hourly budgets are now in place and have resulted in improved and more timely decision-making and intervention based on assessed need, which means there are no waiting lists for home help staff services in Cork, according to the HSE South.

A focussed training plan has seen 750 home help complete two modules of the national SKILLS training pro-
gramme to date, with training earmarked for the remaining 1,250 employees in 2015/2016. The introduction of staff uniforms, ID badges, and the new role of Home Help Co-ordinator is also leading to a more professional service. One of the key performance indicators has already been achieved – that no acute hospital discharges have been delayed as a result of the timely availability of home supports in the Cork area over the past two years.
Donegal Clinical Research Academy

Emergency Abdominal Surgery Course

Designed by the Donegal Clinical Research Academy, in association with world leaders in emergency surgery, the 'Emergency Abdominal Surgery Course' is a novel, interactive course that tackles the management of such common conditions as appendicitis, cholecystitis, pancreatitis, bowel obstruction and diverticulitis – which collectively account for more than 10 per cent of all hospital admissions.

First run in Letterkenny in 2012, the course has been modified and repeated in Dublin in 2013 and 2014. But it is also recognised internationally as one of the world’s leading courses in emergency abdominal care, and has already been run in Portugal, with a further course scheduled for Spain in 2015. Following short lectures and reviews of recent guidelines and literature, interactive case discussions take place, which include videos of presentations, examination imaging and surgery. This, coupled with a manual containing lectures and the latest literature abstracts, ensures, according to the organiser, that the patients of the participants are getting — ‘optimal outcomes’.

Thirty-nine out of the 50 participants at the July 2013 course completed an evaluation, with 37 rating the course as ‘better than any they had previously attended’ in their surgical training.

Best Public Health Initiative

RCPI

Policy Group on Alcohol

Established in 2012 with representation from all medical specialties, the RCPI’s Policy Group on Alcohol – which is chaired by recently elected College President and Consultant Gastroenterologist Prof Frank Murray – provides a forum for discussion on alcohol harm from a medical perspective, and fits in with the College’s aim to play a proactive role in the development of health policy in Ireland. Last year saw the publication of a comprehensive policy statement on alcohol, which proposed various evidence-based solutions to reduce the shocking levels of harm from alcohol witnessed in this country, particularly the increase in liver disease among young people.

The Group – which also has representation from the ICGP, the National Cancer Control Programme, the Irish Cardiac Society and HSE Chronic Disease Prevention Programme – has urged the Government to introduce minimum pricing of alcohol, a reduction in outlet, warnings on alcohol products, and controversially a phasing out of alcohol sponsorship in sport. Through various strategies – including public meetings, press briefings, and presentations made before Oireachtas hearings – the Group has been able to ensure alcohol harm remains high on the political agenda, and its outspoken criticism of Diageo’s ‘Arthur’s Day’ played a significant part in that company’s decision to end that event. The Group continues to put pressure on the Government to prioritise the introduction of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, and thus show the world that we are attempting – according to Prof Murray — to shake off the ‘drunken Irish’ label once-and-for-all.

Best Educational Meeting

The first commendation went to EMS Gathering Ireland for its ‘EMS Gathering Ireland 2014’ meeting, which took a ‘fresh’ approach to education in emergency care through the concept of ‘learning with leisure’, including: a ‘Septic Bus’ tour around Kerry while discussing sepsis management; climbing M CGI

A mountain, while receiving talks on ‘retirement in austere environments’; and hearing all about night club medicine…while in a night club.

A second commendation went to the Stroke Rehabilitation Unit at St Finbarr’s Hospital, Cork (HSE), and the Cork Stroke Support Group for ‘Stroke Rehabilitation and Recovery’, which provided a comprehensive overview of the complexities of stroke rehab, encompassing presentations from expert clinical practitioners, stroke survivors and national advocacy agencies. Registrations for the one-day meeting had to be capped at 350 delegates due to venue restrictions, but the organisers successfully used social media and a website to make all presentations available to a much wider audience.

Commendations

This strong category resulted in two further commendations. The first went to the Irish Examiner for its ‘Health & Ireland: A 32-page special supplement’, which contained a meticulously researched county-by-county breakdown of headline health statistics across more than 20 categories – described by the Director of Research at the Institute of Public Health as “the most high-profile report done in the area of democratising health data”.

Croí, the West of Ireland Cardiac Foundation was also commended for its project ‘Is your finger on the pulse?’ – a programme aimed at teaching people the important skill of pulse checking, carrying out opportunistic screening for undiagnosed atrial fibrillation (AF), and raising awareness of how AF is a major risk factor for stroke.

Commendations

The RCPI were winners of the Best Public Health Initiative Award for ‘Policy Group on Alcohol’. (l-r): Siobhan Creaton; Prof Frank Murray; Mairead Heffron; Dr Colin Edwards, Head of National Medicine and General Manager of Award Sponsors, Boehringer Ingelheim; and Prof Aidan McCormick.

Sponsored by: MIMS Ireland
Commemdation

A commendation was also awarded to FleishmanHillard and Novartis Vaccines for their ‘Meningitis — No Picnic’ campaign. Fronted by Meningitis Research Foundation and ACT for Meningitis, and supported by Novartis Vaccines, the campaign — which adopted the teddy bear as its symbol — was hugely successful in raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of the disease, with a Twitter reach of 471,789 in Ireland — helped greatly by the various celebrities who posted a photo of themselves with a teddy to support the campaign.

Irish Cancer Society

X-HALE Youth Awards

With Irish teens beginning smoking at one of the earliest ages in Europe, the X-HALE Youth Awards from the Irish Cancer Society aim to prevent young people from starting to smoke, through the novel use of social media and online sharing platforms. Through X-HALE — which stands for ‘X’ing out Harmful and Lethal Effects’ — the Society has funded more than 90 youth groups since 2011 to help them create youth-centred, culturally appropriate short, two-minute films on the health effects of tobacco. The X-HALE Film Festival takes place every summer in the Light-house Cinema in Dublin, where all films are showcased on the big screen, with awards presented in various categories. Some 2,300 young people have taken part in the initiative to date, producing 106 films that have been shared through the ICS's YouTube channel. The winning film in 2014 came from Macroom Youthreach for their film ‘Nicotine Nation’ — a Love/Hate-inspired short where tobacco itself is the evil crime boss (see http://bit.ly/XHALE).

Nursing Project of the Year

Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin & UCD

Managing paediatric skin-graft donor sites: A randomised controlled study of three wound care products’

A collaborative venture between Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital, Crumlin (OLHC) and UCD, the study was carried out after a review found no conclusive evidence to support any one particular dressing type for secondary donor site wounds resulting from skin-grafting during the treatment of burn injuries.

The first nurse-led randomised controlled trial ever to be conducted in OLHC, the study — which was presented at the American Burn Association 46th Annual Meeting in Boston in March, and has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Burn Care & Research – compared the use of foam, hydrofibre and alginate. Alginate and hydrofibre were found to be suitable for children’s donor site wounds. However, as alginate is less expensive and offers similar clinical benefits with faster time to healing (7.5 days), the researchers concluded that a calcium alginate is both a clinically — and cost-effective dressing for use on such skin graft donor sites. Its efficacy was further enhanced when used with a standardised protocol for its application and management, the Crumlin/UCD team concluded.

Sponsored by:

Sponsored by:
Two commendations were also awarded in this category, the first of which went to University Hospital Galway for its ‘New Cystic Fibrosis Outpatient Unit and Day Case Facility’, developed in partnership with the HSE and Cystic Fibrosis Galway – the Galway branch of CF Ireland – the new unit, which opened in September, allows children with CF to be treated in an optimal physical environment specifically designed to reduce risk of cross infection. Its construction cost €590,000, of which €250,000 came from CF Galway.

Also recognised with a commendation was Epilepsy Ireland for its ‘BE Seizure Aware Campaign’ for European Epilepsy Day 2014, which was aimed at raising public awareness of epilepsy and improving people’s knowledge of seizure first-aid, helped in no small part by the involvement of Ireland Rugby head coach Joe Schmidt, whose son Luke has the condition.

Irish Lung Fibrosis Association
2000 Steps a Day Challenge for lung fibrosis patients

The Irish Lung Fibrosis Association, together with the Physiotherapy Department at the Mater University Hospital and Prof Jim Egan, developed a novel, tailored, home-based exercise challenge to help the estimated 800 idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) patients in Ireland overcome their fears and limitations about exercise.

A rare, devastating and incurable disease, IPF is life-limiting and patients have a worse prognosis than many cancers, with an average life expectancy of two to three years. They develop severe breathlessness and a need for supplementary oxygen, and hence can understandably avoid exercise despite its proven benefits.

The ‘2000 Steps a Day’ exercise solution for those who cannot access pulmonary rehabilitation classes was the option chosen to empower patients to exercise safely and effectively despite their limitations, by increasing their baseline daily step count by an extra 2,000 steps – equivalent to one mile of walking – at their own pace, aided by special packs containing a pedometer, patient diary and supporting literature. A pilot study has proved its effectiveness and a paper on the project has been selected for a poster presentation at the 2014 British Thoracic Society meeting in London next month (December 4).