

Delegates condemn 80% graduate pay plan

KATHLEEN Burke, from the Limerick Branch said that the government's graduate scheme, which sees new employees on a two-year contract at 80% of the first point on the staff nurse/midwife pay scale "undermines the value of nursing and midwifery within the Irish healthcare service.

"The new graduate, as a registered nurse and midwife, must carry out the full range of responsibilities pertaining to their respective roles. These duties and responsibilities are the same as those of registered nurses and midwives already in employment on a previously set pay scale," she said.

Ms Burke was proposing the motion that 'Conference resolves to condemn the manner by which the professional role of the nurse and midwife is being undermined by the HSE and the Department of Health, in their current initiative, to recruit one thousand graduates without payment of the appropriate salary'.

"The INMO Executive Council has declared this discredited initiative as nothing more than an attempt to employ nurses and midwives as cheap labour and we in the Limerick Branch concur with this," she added.

Lorraine O'Connor from the Cork HSE Branch also endorsed the motion and challenged the HSE to address the issue with the INMO at the Labour Relations Commission.

"We have right on our side and the goodwill of the public on this matter and the issue is not going away. Our graduates deserve fairness and equity and this must be part of any agreement going forward."

Colette O'Sullivan, from the Clonakilty/Skibbereen Branch said that graduates were



"diamonds" and should be "treasured" as such.

"Shame on James Reilly who suggested they should serve burgers. Please support this motion and let's keep our precious diamonds in our country where we need them so badly," she urged.

Anne Price from the Waterford Branch spoke about the calibre of graduates, their loss to the Irish health services and the valuable resource that we were exporting.

"They are way ahead of nurses who have graduated in England and they are taking charge of the wards in England and we are pushing them out of this country," she said.

Allison O'Connell of the Executive Council spoke about her daughter Emma who graduated as a nurse in 2009 but had to go to London to get work and is now in Australia.

She said that even though she missed her enormously she would not want her to take one of the new graduate positions to come back to Ireland. "I urge you to value what we have, value what we do and put a proper price on our

graduates and the service they provide. Do not agree, ever, to sell yourself short and do it for 80%."

Aisling Maher (pictured above left), a 2012 graduate and student nurse representative on the Executive Council, took the opportunity to thank the INMO's nurse and midwife body for their solidarity with students on this issue.

Aoife Gallagher ((pictured above right) from the Letterkenny Branch who has 17 weeks left to run on her internship said that thanks to Minister Reilly she had already decided to emigrate in pursuit of her career.

"I've already bought my ticket to leave this country because of the disgraceful scheme that Minister Reilly has put to us. I give 100% at work. I am 100% liable to An Bord Altranais and the HSE, do I not deserve 100% pay?" she argued.

Speaking on the issue, Liam Doran, INMO general secretary, said that the issue was still very much alive and he re-iterated the INMO's appreciation and thanks to the 2012 graduate

group for their wholesale participation in the boycott of the graduate scheme.

He said that if this issue is not resolved they will have another "huge challenge" in September/October. He said that if the HSE leave this "flawed, disgraceful, yellow pack, opportunistic and scurrilous initiative" on the table then those desperate to find work in Ireland may be forced into acceptance of the programme.

"If there is any waning towards the rightness of this, can I just remind everyone, that if this programme got embedded, then that is the staff nurse salary rate in this country full stop. They will never employ again someone with three or four years experience. They will roll over the programme and the only staff nurse positions that will become available are the ones on 80%."

"This has ripples that will turn into tidal waves, if we don't address it, and arrest it and keep it from taking root," he added.

The motion was put to the floor and carried unanimously.

Austerity dubbed a 'failure'

THE Sligo Branch of the INMO urged the Organisation to call on the Government to cease its current "draconian" austerity measures, which are stifling economic growth and job creation. The motion was put forward at the INMO ADC.

Speaking on the matter, Ann McGowan from the Sligo Branch, said: "These draconian measures have merely protected the fat cats and the banking world, and have driven the vulnerable in our society into an ever-increasing downward spiral of misery.

"Our public health system has been a particular vic-

tim of the effects of reduced funding. Every day, every nurse and midwife in this country witnesses at first-hand, the disimprovements in standards of care in their areas of work.

She continued: "As professionals and patient advocates, we must bring the concerns of those who have no voice of their own into the public arena, and we believe it is now time to engage with the citizens of this country in an open and honest manner about the type of health service they want."

Ms McGowan concluded; "We cannot keep doing

more with less, and Enda et al need to hear that from us everyday."

Supporting the motion, Jo Tully, from the Dublin South-west Branch, said: "Our health services are in complete meltdown. We're talking about the entire acute services: the A & E services, the ICU services, the CCU services, the theatre services are effectively in meltdown."

She added: "The richest section in our society continue to extrapolate from us enormous wealth... Austerity is a failure."

The motion was carried.

International Section seeks equality

THE INMO was asked to liaise with the government to seek equal treatment for members of the International Nurses Section and their families with regards to the cost of college fees.

Delegates at the annual delegate conference mandated the Organisation to engage closely with government agencies and departments to ensure equal treatment with regard to the rights and entitlements of its international members as:

- Residents and citizens of the State
- Full or part-time employed nurses and midwives
- Non-EU nationals with equal social protection
- Individuals with fair access to higher education in relation to tuition costs and qualification recognition.

A short animated film, which highlighted the struggle of international INMO members to pay non-EU tuition fees for their children, despite them having lived in Ireland for all or most of their lives, was shown to the delegation.

Supporting the motion, one speaker argued that international nurses in Ireland have made a "huge contribution" to healthcare in the country.

She added: "We, as an Organisation, need to acknowledge, and fully support this motion."

The motion was carried.

Midwifery workforce is 'on its knees'

"THE persistence of the moratorium on recruitment, coupled with the loss of midwifery expertise due to retirements, has left the national midwifery workforce on its knees, warned Ann Burke from the Executive Council.

She was proposing a motion that "Conference deplores the unsafe midwife staffing levels which now exist, in most maternity units across the country, despite our very high birth rate and the increasing complexity of managing the mother and newborn. In that context conference directs the Organisation to immediately seek the establishment of a review of current midwifery staffing and practice, chaired by an independent expert, with a view to establishing international best practice and standards, with regard to staffing levels and practice in all of Ireland's maternity hospitals and units."

She said that nurses and

midwives were working in a "precarious and poorly resourced" situation every day of the week and this is not reported on until the risk has resulted in an unfortunate tragedy.

"Be under no illusion colleagues, midwives in Galway, and throughout the country, had already been waving a red flag in a desperate bid to highlight the dangers of grossly under resourced maternity wards.

"Midwives deserve better than to be told to 'get on with it'. The women of this country and their unborn deserve better than this too.

"It is imperative that the practice and expertise of Ireland's midwives is protected and not jeopardised by the employer's abject failure to address safe levels of practice in maternity units. The INMO is therefore calling for the urgent establishment of a review of midwifery staffing by an independent chair in order to address midwife

staffing and international best practice and standards," she told delegates.

Maureen Hanlon from the Castlebar Branch warned that what happened in Galway could happen in any hospital in Ireland, not just maternity hospitals. "Everyday I leave my job I look up there and say, 'Thank God the patients I care for are safe today,'" she said.

Adrienne Murphy, from the Cork HSE Branch who works in Cork University Maternity Hospital, said "I implore you to support this motion because we are going to be the next Galway".

Madeline Spiers of the East Coast Area Branch said that an honest and transparent health system was needed. "We need to talk about what's happening in our hospitals in a very open and public way. We need to write to the papers. We need to inform Emily O'Reilly if the HSE does not respond and we need to do it now.

The motion was passed.

Standing Orders Committee

The INMO Standing Orders Committee, elected at the ADC for a two-year term, are:

- Anne Harney, Athlone Branch
- Breda McHugh, Sligo Branch
- Irene Trollip, Dublin East Coast Branch