



# Motivated to achieve

Commencing her second term as INMO president, Claire Mahon spoke to **Alison Moore** about the Organisation's plans for the future

LOOKING back on the first term of her INMO presidency, Claire Mahon said that it was meeting members that drove her enthusiasm for the role.

"I have really enjoyed meeting members around the country and talking with them about their issues. I found it very motivating, even with all of the very difficult challenges that we faced," she said.

It was hearing from members and meeting them in their workplaces that made Claire determined to "see through the job that had been started".

"Going to visit the smaller units as well as the big hospitals and learning from the people I met, made me want to build on my first term and really be involved in driving our new staffing campaign.

"I have had some fantastic opportunities over the two years to do things that I would not normally have done – such as visiting other nursing associations internationally and representing the INMO at International Council of Nurses and European Federation of Nursing events. However, I still find that it is when meeting our members in their workplaces that I find the motivation to keep going," she told *WIN*.

There is much to be learned from those international exchanges however: "There is a global picture of nursing and you find that we are not much different from others when you sit down and talk to professionals from other countries. The issues are quite common, but also the goals we want to achieve are often shared," she said.

One such goal is that of a minimum nurse/midwife to patient ratio which is a

the centre of the INMO's new safe staffing campaign, launched at the recent ADC. One of the speakers there was Judith Kiedja from the New South Wales Nursing and Midwifery Association who told delegates of their success in a similar campaign in recent years.

Claire explained how she first heard about this campaign while representing the INMO at the ICN 25th Quadrennial Congress in Melbourne.

"When I was in Australia, they invited me to address their congress and while I was there I found the information about their staffing campaign really useful. We definitely can learn from one another. You can see what works and what doesn't. It is also useful to hear about the barriers put in front of them at every step in their campaign and how they overcame them. While it may not be a case of 'one size fits all', it gives you ideas to build on."

While an all-singing, all-dancing TV-ad campaign, such as that used in New South Wales to educate the public on the issues at hand, is not an avenue open to the INMO (there are restrictions on trade unions in Ireland in this regard), Claire believes that this does not have to limit the creativity of the Organisation or the members in gaining support for the campaign.

"There is nothing to restrict us from doing things on our website and from coming up with ideas for our own video links, developing posters and trying to get things going virally. Other organisations have done this. National Nurses United and Global Nurses United in the US have some brilliant videos which I have seen on social media.

"The Californian Nurses Association has a very effective video entitled 'Imagine a world without nurses' that shows patients fending for themselves, left alone in an emergency and a newborn alone in a NICU. It is very powerful and drives the message home as to why we need nurses and midwives. The situation is the same here in Ireland and the message still applies, sharing the video shares the message," explained Claire.

As part of the role as president, Claire, who is released from her CNM post to fulfil the presidency, chairs the Executive Council meetings once a month but aside from that she says the tasks evolve on a week-to-week basis.

"I get involved a lot with the IROs if they invite me to visit a hospital so I can meet members there. I will sit in on the safe practice workshops when they are on as this is a great way to hear what the real issues in the workplace are. This helps me to feed back when I have meetings with the various people such as the chief nursing officer. We also have an involvement with groups such as the National Women's Council of Ireland, Global Solidarity, various disability committees, etc that I would attend," she said.

Claire explained how she also attends events hosted or organised by the INMO's many specialist sections, such as the protest outside the Nigerian Embassy in Dublin organised by the International Nurses Section to highlight the 'Bring Back our Girls' campaign (see page 10).

She also spends quite a bit of time at her desk in INMO HQ, corresponding with members and planning ahead.

"There are day-to-day issues that come up and need my attention, my diary is usually pretty full. A lot of the time it is six days a week and the weeks can run into each other, but I'm happy doing it."

I asked Claire, given the extreme change in her weekly routine, if she found herself missing clinical nursing practice.

"I do but I wouldn't change it. I think that is another reason why I enjoy going out to all the hospitals and meeting members on the ground, as well as at the section and branch meetings. It keeps me in touch with what is happening on the frontline," she said.

### Education

The plans to open the newly-acquired Richmond building as an education and training facility are part of a major strategy to put the INMO front and centre of continuing professional development for nurses and midwives.

"I think any service that we can offer to members which is for their benefit is vital. We want to be able to deliver education programmes so that members can maintain their competency and do it at a reasonable price, so that it is affordable for people, as well as provide a facility for groups to come together," said Claire.

A further area that the INMO is working on is the issue of protected time for members to undertake such education programmes. Currently not all nurses and midwives are facilitated in this regard and they are expected to attend CPD courses on their own time.

"Much of the time nurses and midwives are not facilitated with time off, even for mandatory training. It is left up to the employer to provide time and frequently members are left trying to do training in their time off. I'm talking about things like CPR – not expanding knowledge for their own benefit – but updated training to maintain best practice for patient care on a daily basis," she said.

The INMO is working to ensure that its members are treated fairly and are offered the same provisions as other professions obliged to maintain competency, such as teachers, who are afforded protected time.

"We want to ensure that when the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland implements that portion of the Act, there will be provision for release for nurses and midwives, but there is no guarantee of this at the moment. This is the kind of ongoing issue that we are working away on in the

background on behalf of members," said Claire.

### Advanced practice

While there have been many challenges for the professions in recent years, a great deal has been achieved that is positive. Claire believes that the advent of the advanced nurse and midwife practitioner and clinical nurse and midwife specialists over the past decade or so has meant that not only are nurses taking on increased responsibility and becoming more autonomous, but there is now a defined career path for young professionals who wish to progress to these roles.

"Nurses and midwives can become independent practitioners in an area they are passionate about, and develop their own autonomy. It is great that we can now see an avenue to follow but it doesn't mean that every nurse has to strive for this in order to progress their career; we need a combination of both.

"When I was a young nurse, the only real career progression open to me was to go into one of the specialties, such as theatre nursing or paediatrics, or to go into management. Now people can look at the advanced practice route and take a direction doing something they really enjoy while advancing their career and adding value to the health service," she said.

Claire noted that these roles really come to the fore in the area of health promotion.

"If you look at diabetes, asthma and cardiac services, we know that the best way to treat these patients is to keep them on proper maintenance regimes within a special care pathway. This prevents them from becoming acutely ill and aids medication compliance. Much of this kind of service is nurse led."

In midwifery such leadership has an important influence on maternity care.

"Our midwifery-led services are endorsed by both the service users and the evidence base. These are the kinds of services we need more of in Ireland," said Claire.

"In some ways the nurses and midwives at the forefront of this career pathway are like pioneers. They are breaking through barriers for the young professionals of the future and I think the opportunities will continue to broaden as a result," she added.

### Bullying

Bullying was a hot topic at the recent ADC and is an issue that the INMO is invested in overcoming. While it has been a longstanding issue within the profession

to some degree, Claire believes that the current working environment in hospitals around the country is exacerbating the problem.

"I think the job has become so pressured, we are short staffed with demands coming from every direction. In some instances the bullying may not be intended but because the atmosphere is so fraught things are said.

"Workload, burnout and stress, they all impact on it and international evidence shows that when you increase these things it impacts on working relationships with colleagues. You are more tired, breaks and rest time are cut as you try to get more done; some people try to cope by using aggression and some will go in the opposite direction. It is happening and it is a major problem, but one we are working on," said Claire.

### Membership

The INMO is the only dedicated nursing and midwifery union in Ireland, and for this reason, Claire believes, it is best placed to deal with nursing and midwifery issues. It also offers a 'one-stop shop', catering for the varied needs of the professions.

"We also provide a vast amount of education through our Professional Development Centre to meet the needs of our members, at reduced costs. We produce *WIN* magazine which, apart from keeping members up to date, offers a platform for nurses and midwives to share their ideas and experiences and to highlight good practice. We also have Nurse2Nurse and the library facilities, which are invaluable.

"We always want to encourage people to become active and participate. This can just mean taking part in your relevant section and helping to plan a study day. All of these opportunities are there. It is a great network – of almost 40,000 nurses and midwives – to be a part of."

Two years from now, as she hangs up her chain of office and prepares to re-enter clinical practice, Claire hopes that significant inroads will have been made on the safe staffing campaign and that the end of the Haddington Road Agreement in 2016 will see the INMO launched into a new era.

"In tandem with the staffing campaign, I hope that nurses and midwives can regain what they have lost through austerity and gain the respect the professions deserve from the HSE."

Members won't argue with that.