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Challenging and changing times ahead

OVER the summer months, supposedly a quiet time in politics, we have had a number of changes affecting the health service that suggest that challenging, but changing, times are ahead. The first significant change was the appointment of Leo Varadkar as the new Minister for Health with the departure of Dr James Reilly. Mr Varadkar, prior to his appointment to the health portfolio, already established himself as a significant player at the cabinet table, not afraid to express his views in relation to many issues and not just those connected to his previous ministry.

This straight-talking approach should prove an asset as he tries to assimilate the many challenges that face the health service at this time. His initial public comments, focusing on stabilising the budget and raising staff morale, suggest that he has already identified critical areas that require immediate attention. The INMO is scheduled to meet with him on September 8 and we look forward to focused discussions, leading to a greater understanding of what is required to maintain and protect safe care, through safe practice, at all times.

The Minister has also said that the timetable for the introduction of universal health insurance via a number of private insurers will be delayed, with immediate focus on increasing the extent of universal GP coverage starting with the under sixes. This delay, while welcome because the model put forward by government is deeply flawed, must not be allowed to deflect the need for the introduction of a single-tiered, universally available and accessible health system for all citizens in this country. A significant test for the new Minister is how much funding he can secure to address the shortcomings of the current system. This must lead on to securing sustained funding to allow universal healthcare to become a reality.

While the Minister eases into his new portfolio, the INMO will continue to focus on the Patients First campaign, which includes our demand for safe staffing through the introduction of nurse/midwife patient ratios. See *page 7* for details of the initial tranche of regional meetings, involving cross-community groups



and the INMO, which will be held up and down the country later this month and early in October. These are designed to focus the attention of public representatives on what is required in the 2015 budget to stabilise and protect our health system as it continues to be underfunded, understaffed and grossly overworked.

A critically important aspect of the Patients First campaign is that it must be community based, involving your friends, neighbours and relations, as the goal is a safe health service for all that puts patients first, above all else. You will hear much more about this campaign in the coming weeks and every member is asked to become actively involved.

Welcome to our undergraduates

I wish to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues who are just commencing their first-year undergraduate studies in colleges across the country as they enter the nursing and midwifery professions. First of all I want to congratulate you, on your excellent performance in the Leaving Certificate, and to wish you happiness and contentment in your chosen career. I am sure you know that there will be trying days ahead but, ultimately, you have chosen an excellent career that will bring you great satisfaction.

The INMO will be meeting with all our new undergraduates in the coming weeks in colleges across the country and we will provide detailed information on the Organisation's activities and membership benefits.

The very best of luck to each and every one of you as you start your careers.

Liam Doran
General Secretary, INMO