

# Meeting new regulations head on



As Edward Mathews takes up his new role as INMO director of regulation and social policy, **Tara Horan** talks to him about the priorities on his agenda

WITH AN increasingly regulated workplace and a more and more litigious society, it has never been more important for nurses and midwives to have full confidence in their union.

The INMO's new director of regulation and social policy, Edward Mathews is tasked with safeguarding their rights and entitlements in the new regulatory environment.

Edward took over this role recently following his predecessor, Clare Treacy's move back to Galway, where she is now an industrial relations officer for the Galway/Western area, in conjunction with Regina Durcan.

Previously, Edward was an IRO with the INMO since December 2002, initially in

the Mid-Western region and then in the North Dublin region. His involvement with the Organisation dates from his years as a registered nurse in intellectual disability (RNID) at St Mary's, Drumcar, Co Louth, where he trained and then worked there for over two years. During this time he started attending union meetings as there were staffing difficulties in the hospital.

"I was voted as a local rep by my colleagues and we were successful at negotiating a staffing review in St Mary's at the time to obtain extra resources. I was then put forward as a branch officer and later as a section officer with the RNID Section. So at the same time I was involved as a section and branch officer and a local workplace rep. I then became

involved in national discussions at the time around the role and function of the RNID and other people working in that field. This was in the busy time of the early 2000s and all of these elements together sparked my interest in industrial relations. I applied for a job with the INMO and began as an IRO in the Mid-West region."

Edward's new role has three main elements – as well as the two areas of regulation and social policy, he has also become the Organisation's representative for directors and assistant directors of nursing and midwifery.

## Regulation

The primary challenge now facing the INMO in the regulatory field is the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011, which provides a new fitness to practise regulatory regime and will see the advent of public hearings of these cases for nurses and midwives.

"These hearings will be a very harrowing experience for individual nurses and midwives," said Edward. "The fitness to practise process overall is extremely challenging. It is a frightening experience to have a complaint made against you. One of the more frightening elements for every nurse and midwife I talk to now is when I warn them that if the matter goes to a full enquiry, it is likely to be held in public.

"While regulation around the world is moving towards having a more public face, there is a lot to be said for the detailed decisions being made public, rather than the entire hearing being in public. A nurse's career could be destroyed just by being guilty of association with an allegation. Everyone reads the media story but not the conclusion.

"We are working very hard at the moment to try to get a proper balance with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland between the necessity for appropriate cases to be heard privately, while hearings can be heard predominantly in public. This will be an ongoing discussion and battle to ensure that as many as possible appropriate cases are held in private to protect the nurse or midwife, while ultimately not impugning the mandate of the Board to protect the public."

Another concern is that an increase in complaints will arise out of the public nature of fitness to practise hearings as people become more aware of the process. "Managing how we deal with any increase in complaints and also mak-

ing sure that we never move away from providing the highest quality of representation for those members will be a continuing challenge for me and for other officers of the INMO," Edward said.

#### Healthcare standards

The increasing number of standards emerging from the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) on the regulation of the provision of healthcare is another major issue.

"We have standards in relation to care of older people, disability services and so on. Increasingly we will have standards for every service, including acute services. It is crucially important that HIQA sets standards but it's also crucial that its job goes beyond simply saying when that standard is not met. It must look at the causes of that and look at the system, as well as the people in the service," said Edward.

"It's a key challenge for us to persuade HIQA that although people can do wrong, systems do wrong too. It needs to look at staffing, it needs to look at resources and it needs to look beyond just individual conduct in many circumstances."

#### Social policy

Social policy is another major priority area for the INMO. Working with the Executive Council's social policy committee, Edward will be endeavouring to move forward the social policy agenda set by the ADC. He will also be dealing with matters that arise due to the circumstances faced by members and relevant issues in society.

A huge issue that the INMO has been working on in this area is the Turn Off the Red Light campaign, which seeks to criminalise the purchase of sex, rather than criminalising those who are forced into a situation of selling sex.

"It is important that we continue to get across the message that prostitution is not work but is a form of human slavery in many respects. It's a year now since the Oireachtas Justice Committee recommended the criminalisation of the purchase of sex, but yet nothing has been done," said Edward.

"We are also working in the area of healthcare provision during conflict as a right of all combatants and ensuring that people who are *hors de combat* are provided with healthcare in an indiscriminate fashion. Everyone who is not fighting is entitled to healthcare and healthcare workers should be protected from attack. Allied to that is the position

of women in conflict and the fact that women shouldn't become a target merely because they're women. The raping of women and the use of women as human shields are totally unacceptable."

Social policy covers a number of areas in the influencing of government on issues such as:

- Care of the older person and the maintenance of public services for them
- Equality for women, including wage differentials between women and men
- The marriage equality campaign, in which the INMO is advocating for equal access to marriage for same sex couples as well as opposite sex couples.

The INMO established an LGBT committee last year and had its inaugural conference. A motion at this year's ADC was successful in its call to have this as an annual event on the Organisation's calendar. "The nursing and midwifery workforce is an inclusive workforce and we must not only provide the highest quality of care for LGBT persons but must ensure that the workplace is a comfortable one for them.

"As well as being there to advance the terms and conditions of our members as a trade union, we are a social movement. We are supposed to influence and to try to effect social change for the good of all in society and particularly to attempt to effect social change on behalf of those who may be regarded as being marginalised or those who may be suffering inequality. That's a huge part of my role now with the social policy committee," said Edward.

#### Management team

As the director of regulation and social policy, Edward is part of the management team of the INMO. "While there are different functions allocated to individuals on that team, it is a group effort between all the managers, the Executive Council, the IROs and all the staff to ensure that the needs of our members are met," said Edward.

Edward is now also taking over responsibility for the representation of directors and assistant directors of nursing and midwifery. As well as providing individual representation for this group, Edward will also be responsible for seeking to gain more recognition for the key role played by nurse managers in maintaining safe and quality standards. "We are resisting strenuously the apparent objective of general management to de-stratify and to

reduce the numbers of nurse managers," Edward said.

#### The law and other interests

In addition to his original RNID qualification, Edward also holds first class honours Bachelor of Law and Master of Law degrees. His interest in the law grew out of his deep involvement in employment law in the course of his work with the INMO. He began studying at night in 2008 at Griffith College, Dublin, where he came top of his class. He then went on to TCD to undertake a Master of Law programme. There his research was in a mixed public law and medical law subject, on whether, and if so, in what circumstances the transmission of a disease during sexual intercourse should be criminalised.

After that he began a research-based PhD programme in TCD, which he is now half way through. Simultaneously, he undertook a Barrister at Law degree at the King's Inns, which he attended every second weekend over two years. He has just successfully finished this course.

Edward also does some evening teaching in law in Griffith College and TCD.

Born in 1980, Edward is from Togher, Co Louth. He now lives in Dublin city centre near Christ Church Cathedral, from where he is fortunate to be able to walk to INMO headquarters in a matter of minutes. With a keen interest in film, he enjoys living so centrally.

He goes home to Dundalk frequently to visit his mother. "My mother has a disability and I have always had a huge protective sense to ensure that anyone who hasn't got what everyone else has shouldn't be disadvantaged as a result of that. She has played a huge influence on my life because of that," said Edward.

Edward also enjoys travelling, particularly in the US.

As part of his work with the INMO, he was associated with the European Trade Union Confederation and was president of its young workers committee, which represents about 60 million workers under the age of 35 within the EU.

In his free time also, he volunteers with the Irish Innocence Project, which investigates allegations on behalf of persons who have been convicted of a crime that they have been wrongfully convicted. He also volunteers with the Free Legal Advice Centres and is a director of the FLAC in Griffith College, which provides free legal advice to the students and staff there.