

Report on one-day conference organised by the Adelaide Hospital Society and the Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Trinity College, Dublin.

By: Anne Grace.

This conference was held on Wednesday 14th April 2010 at the Davenport Hotel, Merrion Square, Dublin and was titled:

### **Financing Universal Healthcare in Ireland – the way forward.**

Professor Tom O'Dowd from Trinity College welcomed the delegates and the speakers. He introduced the first speaker, who was Dr. Ezekiel J. Emanuel. Dr Emanuel is currently serving as a Special Advisor on Health Policy to the Director of the office of Management and Budget, The White House, USA. He is an oncologist and his *Healthcare, Guaranteed: A Simple, Secure Solution for America (New York 2008)* was a key contribution to the healthcare reform debate in the United States. Dr. Emanuel outlined the history of the Healthcare Bill which was passed, but has not as yet been enacted in the US. He posed the question 'What have we to learn in Ireland from the American experience?'

The second speaker was Professor Charles Normand who is professor of Health Policy and Management at Trinity College. He is an economist and has worked in health and health care for 25 years. His paper was **Changing the Funding of Health Systems** and he examined how health care is funded in other countries and gave examples of the different systems used in Europe.

After lunch, professor Ian Graham launched the Policy Paper by the Adelaide Hospital Society: **Policy Paper, Universal Health Insurance: The Way Forward for Irish Healthcare.**

(this document can be downloaded at [www.adelaide.ie](http://www.adelaide.ie) )

Dr. Steven Thomas spoke about the report commissioned by the Adelaide Hospital Society, a copy of which was given to each delegate. This report, **Effective Foundations for the Financing and Organisation of Social Health Insurance in Ireland**, was compiled by Stephen Thomas, Padhraig Ryan and Charles Normand and is the third in a series on developing Social Health Insurance in Ireland. This report 'sets out to evaluate fully detailed options for financing and organising SHI within likely conditions' (page 4)

Professor Frances Ruane is Director of the ESRI. She is Chairman of the Expert Group on Resource Allocation and Financing in the Health Sector, which was set up in April 2009. The paper she gave was called **A Turning Point in Health Policy?** and was an outline of the

work the Expert Group is engaged in. This group was set up on the invitation of the minister, Mary Harney, and Professor Ruane's talk was not very satisfactory as the group is bound by confidentiality. When questioned she agreed that the report was looking at health policy based on the private/public provision of healthcare in Ireland.

Next on the agenda was **The Political Challenge: Responses.**

This part of the conference was given over to the politicians from the non-governing parties.

Enda Kenny spoke about Fine Gael's position on the provision of universal health insurance and he referred time and again to the model used in the Netherlands by which workers would pay through a PAYE system, and those who couldn't afford to pay would be subsidised by the government. Insurance companies would be used to provide cover.

Eamon Gilmore said that the Labour Party was in favour of universal health insurance on the same lines as Fine Gael.

Caoimhghin O'Caolain, for Sinn Fein, said that his party was in favour of a national health system to be paid out of taxes and available to everybody.

(There was no representation from Fianna Fail or the Green Party)

The Minister for Health and Children gave the concluding address and repeated the policy for health care that has been the government's position. There will be no single tier health insurance in Ireland under this government and private health insurance is the choice of the majority of the Irish people, she said.

This was a worth-while conference because it demonstrated that there is a feeling that universal health insurance is a viable option for Ireland. The question is what form it should take.