

Women on Walls Address

Professor Cathal Kelly, Chief Executive and Registrar, RCSI

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Minister Mitchell O' Connor, Minister Doherty, Senator Clifford-Lee Presidents, Members of Council, Past-Presidents, Deans, Members of Faculty and distinguished guests, you are very welcome to RCSI, for this very special and happy occasion.

I would like to especially welcome our artists and the families of the subject of our portraits, who were able to join us today. You are very welcome. I would like to acknowledge former President of RIA Prof Mary Daly who started WoW process in 2016 and Micheal Kennedy, current President

This has been a great project, and there are too many people to thank individually, but if you will indulge me there are some who deserve special thanks.

I would like to thank our College Archival team, Susan Leyden, Mary Doherty and Ronan Kelly, they have done an exceptional job in identifying , profiling and indeed championing the women who played such an important part in our history.

I would like to thank our colleagues in Accenture, Alastair Blair, Michelle Cullen and colleagues, who have supported us and been great advocates for gender equality in the workplace. Importantly, they have made the argument and demonstrated, that equality is not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do, to help organisations to thrive in an ever more competitive world.

Andrew Hetherington and his colleagues in Business to Arts have been great advisors and guides for us, on this fascinating journey.

Our artists are exceptional people, it has been a privilege to see their portfolio of work, prior to selection, to meet them during the commission and see their portraits evolve. I'm grateful for the effort that they put into the commission, doing in-depth research into their subjects, meeting family members, to render their subjects character and family traits.

Avril Hutch, Sarah Fink and Julia Morrow, in our EDI Unit have driven this project for RCSI and I think you will agree, they with our Estates and Events teams have done a superb job.

I would also like to acknowledge our Dean, Prof Hannah McGee, who has driven gender equality in this College, long, long before it was fashionable. She has pushed equality and meritocracy at all levels.

I think the people looking down at us, from these walls, would be really proud of us, today.

Our founders in 1784, established this College for the public good, to provide a non-sectarian education, 35 years before Catholic Emancipation.

Those that followed them, admitted the first female to a medical school in Britain or Ireland, and admitted to their Fellowship, the first female surgical Fellow, in these Isles, Emily Winfred Dickson.

When John Henry Newman founded the Catholic University of Ireland, later to be UCD, its medical school could only start, because RCSI supported it, with our Faculty and allowed the students sit our exams.

And in 2010, Prof Eilis McGovern, became our 168th President and the first woman to become President of College of Surgeons, anywhere in the English-speaking world.

Those of us who are College Officers today are guardians of our Culture.

Our culture is determined by our purpose or Mission

“To educate, nurture and discover for the benefit of human health”

It is underpinned by our Values

“Respect, Collaboration, Scholarship and Innovation”

Central to “Respect and Collaboration” is our deep commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. And we will only realise our full potential in “Scholarship and Innovation”, if all our staff and students feel free to bring their whole-selves to work, irrespective of their beliefs, race, gender or orientation.

I’m delighted that we are finally getting to honour these exceptional women, who made such a contribution to healthcare in Ireland and further afield..

What inspirational women they were, individually, and now collectively:

Dr Victoria Coffey was the first female President of the Irish and Irish American Paediatric Association and one of the first female paediatricians in Ireland to investigate Sudden infant Death Syndrome;

Dean Mary Frances Crowley - the founder and first Dean of RCSI’s Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery;

Dr Emily Winifred Dickson was the first female fellow in surgery in Ireland and the UK;

Dr Pearl Dunleavy - the lynchpin of Dublin's Tuberculosis immunisation programme;

Dr Mary Josephine Hannan lead the way, as the first woman to train and qualify from RCSI;

Sr & Dr Maura Lynch who dedicated her life to missionary work in Angola and Uganda, and established a pioneering fistula repair programme;

Dr Barbara Maive Stokes - a paediatrician and change making disability campaigner;

and

Dr Mary Somerville Parker Strangman - Waterford's first female councillor, a suffragette and campaigner for women's and public health services.

We are immensely proud and privileged that these eight women now grace the walls of the RCSI Boardroom.

The space in which their portraits will hang is no ordinary room. In that room, every significant figure in the history of Irish medicine and surgery has stood, the people that introduced antiseptics, anesthesia, radiology, dialysis, orthopaedic surgery, transplantation, and all the advances in specialist surgery, have stood in that room. I

would like to think that in it, as they looked at the portraits of those who went before them, they thought about their future and contribution.

“If you cant see it, you can’t be it.”

It is important that future generations, who will advance healthcare for tomorrow, are aware of the breakthroughs and contribution of these women and will feel empowered and challenged to make their own contribution, regardless of their sex or background.

Ireland is the epitome of a “soft-power nation”, you can travel anywhere in the world, were our people have been and you will meet leaders, cabinet members, leading figures, who have been deeply influenced by an Irish Nurse, Nun, Priest or Brother and who has given them a great affinity and respect for Ireland. People who have travelled to Ireland to study, are our most effective Ambassadors, and give us influence and impact, way in excess of our size. The most likely way for this to continue, if it is to continue, is through education.

Our Universities, if they deserve the name, must be more than mere degree-factories, they must be force-multipliers.

RCSI is a global gateway to healthcare, we take hundreds of students in, from all over the world, we give them the knowledge and skills for professional success, but also the Professionalism and through our Values, our commitment to EDI and days like today, a commitment to social justice and advocacy.

When you think that the average doctor will see 20,000 patients in their career and we have 16,000 Alumni in over 60 countries worldwide,..... now that is soft-power.

It now gives me great pleasure, to introduce our Minister of State at the Department of Education, with special responsibility for Higher Education, Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor. The Minister has demonstrated that she is not hamstrung by old tired ideologies in Higher Education and that she is determined to make an advance in gender equality in the Higher Education Sector.

I give you Minister Mitchell O'Connor.