



## Consultant blames lack of specialist care units for crisis 1,000 'needless deaths' from strokes each year

AT LEAST one thousand stroke victims are dying needlessly in Ireland each year due to a lack of medical resources, it is claimed.

Consultant neurologist Dr Peter Kelly also revealed that on top of the 2,000 stroke-related deaths in Ireland each year at least 5,000 victims who survive are left with a permanent neurological disability.

After conducting extensive research, Dr Kelly, the director of stroke services at the Mater Hospital in Dublin, said that more dedicated stroke units are urgently needed to prevent unnecessary deaths.

Addressing the high level of stroke-related deaths in the country, he pointed out that if so many people died because of an infectious disease, it would be considered an epidemic.

His calls for more services are backed up by the revelation that strokes account for 10 per cent of admissions to accident

By **Kate Chambré**

and emergency wards and only two of the 37 acute hospitals in the country have established stroke units.

Dr Kelly also revealed that new 'clot-busting' medication would be able to provide a complete cure for one in three patients who are given the drug within an hour and a half of a stroke.

He explained that Plasminogen Activator (tPA) treatment had been licensed in Europe in 2003 but is not yet available in Irish hospitals because there are only three stroke consultants qualified to administer it.

He said it is his belief that between 20 to 50 consultants should be trained in the area.

'This is a major advance but it poses a challenge to the health system to make the treatment available.'

'It can't be given by any doctor, it needs to be given by a consultant trained in evaluation and administration of the treatment,' he said.

Anne Copeland of the Volunteer Stroke Scheme said that the treatment would make a huge difference to the quality of life of stroke victims.

But she said it was 'not just a matter of training' consultants. And she criticised the Government for not being willing to provide the finance for the sophisticated infrastructure needed to administer it.

'The treatment could mean the difference in a stroke patient walking out of hospital, without requiring

### Training in new treatment needed

any rehabilitation services, or walking out of hospital with a disability that will stay with them for life,' she said.

'A stroke needs to be treated as a stroke-attack with instant treatment, similar to heart-attack cases,' she added.

Around 2,000 people die from

strokes each year, similar to the numbers killed by lung, breast and bowel cancer combined.

Of the victims who survive, however, it is estimated that 5,000 a year are left with permanent disabilities such as paralysis or speech impediments.

Although Dr Kelly welcomed the establishment of a national expert group to examine options for improved care, he also called for a national stroke strategy, similar to the cardiovascular and cancer strategies.

He explained that this could prevent 1,400 cases of death or disability a year.

Meanwhile, research has also found that every year an estimated 2,000 people under the age of 65 suffer a stroke and are not entitled to the same rehabilitation services as older patients.

It is understood that the majority of these patients are left with no option but to travel to Dublin for treatment and often have to wait for up to 18 months to receive it.

## Women still treated as inferior to men in the workplace

IRISH females are storming the last bastions of male-dominated professions but they are being treated as inferior to men.

Despite new predictions that women will soon outnumber men in traditionally exclusive professions such as law and medicine, equal rights campaigners last night cautioned against taking too rosy a view of the future.

Nell Crowley, chief executive of the Equality Authority, warned that there was still a vast divide in the gender gap due to discrimination in the workplace.

While the 15,510 females who enrolled on honours degree courses last autumn may land plum jobs when they graduate, Mr Crowley said that they will not necessarily get equal pay and may be overlooked for promotion.

'There is still a long way to go for gender equality in the workplaces of Ireland,' he said.

'Women still experience significant inequality in their jobs and the new data is a wake-up call to employers.'

The Central Applications Office (CAO) figures show that the majority of dentists, vets, pharmacists, doctors, designers, teachers, and lawyers of the future will be female.

With 4,541 more females than males accepting places on third-level programmes this year, Mr Crowley said that it was time for companies to re-evaluate their antiquated views on women.

'If employers want to attract significant numbers of quality workers in the future, they must make the workplace more female-friendly.'

'There are strong gains to be made by introducing equality in professional fields.'

The stereotype of the woman as the principle carer must also be shattered if women are to win the battle of the sexes, he said.

'The workplace would benefit from more flexible hours to allow women to adopt a more caring role within the family, which is largely the cause of women taking extra time from their jobs.'

## Ahern urges Sinn Féin to act on PSNI

TAOISEACH Bertie Ahern last night urged Sinn Féin to call a party conference to debate its support for polling in the North.

After chief negotiator Martin McGuinness revealed that the Sinn Féin national executive would meet on Saturday to discuss the plan, Mr Ahern said it would be unforgivable to miss this chance to help bring about power sharing.

And he also urged them to take the step themselves rather than wait for commitments from the Democratic Unionist Party.

Mr Ahern said he was sensitive to fears republicans have in backing the PSNI and also the concerns the DUP have about power sharing.

But he added that with a commitment to support polling from Sinn Féin, the concerns of DUP leader Rev Ian Paisley would be removed.

## Truck breakdown forces Port Tunnel closure

THE M50 Dublin Port Tunnel was shut down again yesterday after a car transporter broke down inside it.

The tunnel was closed in both directions for safety reasons after an articulated lorry heading north ground to a halt at around 10.30am.

The fire brigade was called to the scene as a precaution, but the lorry was soon moved and the

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tunnel reopened by 11.49am.

There was minor congestion around Dublin Port but AA Roadwatch said there were no major problems as traffic in the area was not at its peak.

'To be honest, it has been very quiet this morning, and we have not seen too much traffic in the area,' said an AA spokesman. The €725million Dublin Port Tunnel

has been hit by a number of closures since its official opening on December 20 last year.

Truckers were annoyed when the controversial tunnel closed for further work just the day after its official opening.

Further closures occurred as final safety tests were carried out.

And bosses blamed the ESB for that power surge that closed the thoroughfare on New Year's Eve. A power surge at Coolock hit the

expensive lighting and signalling system in the tunnel, forcing it to close for four hours.

The 4.6km stretch of motorway was designed to take heavy goods vehicles away from the city centre but was dogged by delays during construction.

It was also heavily criticised for coming in over budget.

The tunnel is toll-free for HGVs and coaches.