

SPHeRE

network

POPULATION HEALTH AND HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH NETWORK UPDATE

10 Year Celebration of SPHeRE

by Prof. Anne Hickey, RCSI / SPHeRE

Much has happened since the HRB awarded the first structured PhD Programme in Health Services Research to a joint submission from RCSI, TCD and UCC in September 2007.

At that time the programme was funded for four intakes of six PhD scholars a year, the final intake to take place in 2010. When the programme was launched, no-one expected it to have the broad appeal that it has had and continues to have in the subsequent SPHeRE programme. As well as the programme having funding to support six PhD scholars annually, there was considerable interest in becoming involved in the wider healthcare community, with a number of applicants coming forward each year with an alternate source of funding to complete the programme, or proposing to complete it on a part-time basis. As a result, the annual class size each year has been 10-12 PhD scholars.

In 2013, following a rigorous process with international adjudication, the original programme was overtaken by an ambitious successor – the SPHeRE Programme. As well as maintaining its core function of graduating high caliber interdisciplinary PhD scholars, the SPHeRE programme has four key objectives: (1) to expand to a national programme, incorporating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) beyond the founding institutions; (2) to encompass population health research alongside health services research

through the expansion of current taught input and thesis topics; (3) to build a knowledge translation network; (4) to upgrade that national skills base, including the establishment of a Diploma in PHHSR.

The SPHeRE Programme now has a broad-reaching national faculty, registered PhD scholars, alumni and an extensive network of researchers, policy makers and practitioners. Each year, it organizes key events to bring this network together, including Spring and Autumn seminars, peer-led events, policy dialogues and its annual conference, which increases in popularity each year – growing from XX attendees at the first SPHeRE conference in 2015 to XX attendees at the third conference in 2017. Of the 100 or so scholars that have registered on the SPHeRE programme and its predecessor, approximately 40 have graduated with a PhD, five with an MSc and approximately 55 are currently registered. The demand for scholarships on the programme continues to be very high, typically with 150 applicants each year for six scholarships. The breadth of research topics and research methods employed on the programme is considerable, facilitated by the breadth of disciplines and expertise of the extensive network of SPHeRE supervisors involved in the programme across HEIs nationally. The dissemination activities of scholars is considerable, ranging from poster presentations and oral presentations at national and international conferences, to peer-review publication in top-



quartile international journals, to an impressive number of prizes and bursaries awarded competitively.

The proof of success of this programme, now celebrating its 10-year anniversary, is the success of its alumni. All of our SPHeRE graduates have had considerable success in securing subsequent employment, many in PHHSR post-doctoral and research officer positions, some in policy and research roles in both the public and private sector, and others in academic and senior practitioner roles.

We are very proud of the achievements of the SPHeRE programme over the past 10 years and look forward with enthusiasm to the next 10 years of this very successful programme!

WELCOME

Welcome to the latest SPHeRE Newsletter filled with updates on your Network. Since the last SPHeRE Newsletter we've had the 2017 SPHeRE conference – over 30 excellent oral presentations and 3 outstanding keynotes in one day! This year, we're working on delivering a new SPHeRE website for you. We are preparing for policy dialogues. Research priorities have been published and we are finalising a packed schedule of events for the remainder of 2017. Enjoy the newsletter and as always if you have any suggestions or queries, please get in touch at m.davoren@ucc.ie.

*Martin Davoren
Assistant Director for Networks*

3rd Annual SPHeRE Conference

Connecting Research, Policy & Practice

The beginning of January marked the 3rd Annual SPHeRE Network Conference. This year we focused on supporting solutions by connecting research, policy and practice.

The conference was attended by almost 200 researchers, practitioners and policy makers from across the SPHeRE Network. Over 30 oral presentations were delivered in parallel sessions investigating complex interventions, economic evaluation and access to healthcare in Ireland. 40 posters were presented on the day, with Paula Byrne (NUIG) being awarded Best Poster Prize by Prof. Steven Thomas.

Many thanks to all who attended and supported the SPHeRE network on the day!

#sphere17

Spot Yourself?



Mr Ciaran McCarthy SPHeRE, Dr Martin Davoren SPHeRE, Prof. Steve Thomas TCD / SPHeRE



Ms Orla Gilehane TCD, Dr Suzanna Dooley TCD, Ms Mairead O'Driscoll HRB



Ms Marian Hernon UCD, Mr Padraic Fleming Maynooth, Ms Niamh O'Rourke Department of Health, Ms Aoife Gallagher, UL.



Ms Louise Farragher, Dr Marie Sutton, Dr Hamish Sinclair, HRB



Ms Leah Russell, Mr Sean O'Shea, VHI



Ms Ailbhe Lamont HRB, Ms Teresa Maguire Department of Health



Dr Niamh O'Rourke Department of Health, Dr Sarah Barry SPHeRE, Ms Louise Mullen NCCP



Dr Sarah Barry, Mr Carlos Bruen, Prof. Anne Hickey SPHeRE with Dr Annalisa Montesanti HRB



Your SPHeRE Team at the 3rd Annual Conference

Conference Reflections

by *Deirdre Mongan, Research Officer,
HRB Evidence Centre*

The 3rd SPHeRE Network Conference held in RCSI on 12 January, brought together more than 180 researchers, policy-makers and practitioners under the theme of 'Supporting solutions: Connecting Research, Policy and Practice'.

Over the day there were over 40 speaker presentations and 40 poster presentations detailing a range of research projects, relating to areas such as healthcare reform, dementia, diabetes, and maternal and child health. Key note speakers included Professor Mike Kelly from the University of Cambridge; Professor Ella Arensman, Director of Research at the National Suicide Research Foundation; and Professor Mark Petticrew from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Professor Kelly provided a very interesting overview of the relationship between research, policy and practice and spoke of his experience at NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) in the UK, where he worked across a range of topics including tobacco, alcohol and obesity. He said that health researchers need to 'think slow' about how their research can influence policy and practice, and emphasised the need for researchers to engage with policy makers to help research have impact. Given the theme of the conference, this talk provided a very useful summary of the difficulties associated with translating research into policy and set the scene for the speakers that followed.

Professor Arensman, described recent trends in self-harm, especially among young people in Ireland. She also talked about suicide risk factors and provided a fascinating insight to the impact the media can have in the way suicide is reported.



Deirdre Mongan, Research Officer, HRB Evidence Centre

Professor Petticrew, focused on the role of evaluation in evidence-based health policy. He talked about the myth of perfect evidence and how there is rarely a 'killer' study in the area of public health that provides definitive evidence to guide public health policy. He also spoke of the challenge of generating 'good enough' research evidence and the tactics used by industries including the tobacco industry to undermine public health evidence.

From a personal point of view, I was delighted that my colleagues and I were given an opportunity to describe the work we do in the Evidence Centre of the Health Research Board, which was established in 2011 and has contributed to the formation of evidence-informed policy in Ireland. It was also very encouraging to see the range and quality of population health research being undertaken throughout the country, which is in no small part due to the work of the SPHeRE initiative.

YOU SAID...

Thanks for all the positive feedback.....

"There was plenty of time for networking. I met loads of new people!"

"The keynote speakers were excellent. The parallel sessions were themed well which worked nicely and avoided too much moving around."

"The keynote speakers were excellent. The presentation by the HRB was very interesting and useful."

"Excellent conference! I have no suggestions for improvement!"

"Great networking opportunity. Good to hear about all the research projects that are happening and their direct applicability to policy and practice."

"As a scientist and health services manager, it was a good opportunity to find out about some of the latest research approaches to support policy."

Who use statins & why?

A cross-sectional analysis of statin utilisation in the context of cardiovascular risk and socio-demographic factors from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) - Paula Byrne (NUIG), John Cullinan (NUIG), Catriona Murphy (DCU), Susan M. Smith (RCSI).

Background: Statins are widely prescribed for primary and secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and command a large share of drug expenditure. The evidence bases in various diagnostic categories vary, and therefore, so do the benefit-risk ratios.

Aim: The aim of the study was to describe the prevalence of statin utilisation by people aged over 50 and the factors associated with the likelihood of using a statin.

Methods: The study comprised a cross-sectional analysis of factors associated with statin utilisation from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) (n=5,618). Prevalence of statin utilisation was calculated according to age, gender



Prof Steve Thomas with Ms Paula Byrne (SPHeRE scholar based in NUIG), winner of best poster 2017

and diagnosis. The likelihood of statin utilisation was estimated using multivariate logistic regression models.

Findings: This study is currently under review with a medical journal and findings be published soon.

Conclusion: This study leads us to question if the widespread use of statins in some low-risk diagnostic categories represent the best use of scarce resources. There may be an over-emphasis on single risk factors rather than overall risk of CVD. The association between polypharmacy and statin usage warrants further investigation.

SPHeRE Network Autumn Seminar

In the beautiful surroundings of the Irish House of Lords Chamber in October 2016, Prof Nick Sevdalis from Kings College, London detailed the art of implementation science to the SPHeRE Network.

Giving a brief history of implementation science and its importance across research areas, Nick outlined the work of the Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) – South London. He detailed the complexity of an implementation science centre in tandem with highlighting its importance in society. CLAHRC's investigate public health issues including alcohol, diabetes, maternal and women's health, and stroke.

The focus on implementation science details health economics, applied statistics and quality improvement, encompassing the beliefs of patients, academics, policy makers, funders and implementers. This collaborative outlook is key to excellent implementation science according to Sevdalis.



10 PRIORITIES

SPHeRE's research priorities include:

- 1) Access to healthcare
- 2) Models of health services
- 3) Implementation of complex interventions
- 4) Behaviour change
- 5) Economic evaluation of healthcare services
- 6) Patient and public involvement
- 7) The role of different stakeholders in the health system
- 8) Healthy lifestyles
- 9) Health informatics
- 10) Social care and community engagement in service design

SPHeRE Research Priorities

At the 2016 conference you, the stakeholders, were asked to participate in a research prioritisation exercise and we are delighted to announce the SPHeRE research priorities.

How were they formed?

Initially, 26 themes were noted from the National Consultative Forum and the Irish national research priorities. Our 170 delegates from academic, practitioner and policy settings at last year's SPHeRE Conference worked in groups to develop questions or topics of interest. The top rated topics/questions by theme were submitted from each group. Following the conference a report on this exercise was submitted to the SPHeRE Steering Committee to debate and discuss the various courses of action while making comments and recommendations. Comments were compiled and analysed.

How will we use them?

Beginning with the 2016-17 Cohort and applied

to all other new cohorts moving forward, scholars are required to specify the contribution of their PhD topics in addressing at least one of the SPHeRE research priorities.

For the upcoming 2017 intake of scholars, the SPHeRE research priorities will be used in advertising the Programme to potential applicants, and consideration will be given to the candidate's interest in these priority areas during recruitment. In evaluating their thesis proposals and annual milestone report submissions, both supervisors and academic panels will review scholars' engagement with the SPHeRE research priorities as part of the overall review process.

So thank you to you, the SPHeRE Network, for defining our priorities. Your hard work is already having an impact across the programme.

CONFERENCES

Are you attending a national or international conference in the near future? The SPHeRE Network would love to hear about it!

Send your experiences, reflections or photos to m.davoren@ucc.ie for inclusion in our next newsletter.



Rebecca Dennehy UCC presenting her poster at the 2017 SPHeRE Network Annual Conference

ACJRD Annual Conference

Cybercrime



The Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development (ACJRD) seeks to promote reform, development and effective operation of the criminal justice system. It does so by providing a forum where experienced personnel can discuss ways of working in an informal setting, by promoting study and research in the field of criminal justice and by promoting the highest standards of practice by professionals associated with criminal justice.

The 19th Annual Conference of the ACJRD on the theme of "Cybercrime" took place on Friday 7th October 2016 in the Spencer Hotel Dublin. The conference, conducted under The Chatham House Rule, provided a platform for multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary perspectives and an opportunity to exchange information and views on the contemporary problem of cybercrime.

SPHeRE Scholar, **Rebecca Dennehy UCC**, contributed a public health perspective on cyberbullying during her workshop "Cyberbullying and Young People: Behaviours, Experiences, and Resolutions".

Rebecca outlined what is known about cyberbullying and highlighted the potential negative impact on the physical and mental health of young people. Rebecca stressed the need for consensus on the definition of cyberbullying in order to make progress in addressing it and provided evidence to support involving young people in this process. Stimulating discussion ensued where it was acknowledged that cyberbullying is a serious issue and agreed that young people should be part of the solution and not merely the focus of the problem.

Diverse Populations: PHHSR in practice

The SPHeRE Programme is delighted to announce that a new and innovative Postgraduate Diploma (Level 9) in Population Health and Health Services Research (PHHSR) will be available for the first time in September 2017. This qualification will be jointly awarded by RCSI, TCD and UCC—a first in the Irish health education landscape. Delivery of the Postgraduate Diploma will build on the collaborative and multidisciplinary strengths of the SPHeRE Programme.

The course, as a skills-building and career enhancing award, will be delivered primarily online offering flexibility of access to busy and senior applicants. It is designed for clinicians and allied health professionals working within and beyond the HSE; early and mid-career researchers working across a range of organisations including medical charities, key sector funders (e.g. Dementia, Cancer Research), relevant Government departments, academic departments and public health promoters; as well as private health research organisations and health care providers.

It is available as either a two-year part-time or one year full-time taught course. Applicants are required to hold a National Qualifications Framework Level 8 primary degree qualification (or equivalent) in health, social science, statistics, economics or related discipline.

Over six modules this Postgraduate Diploma will equip students with knowledge of the social and individual determinants of health, the complexity of health delivery from a range of systems perspectives, and an understanding of the functional relationships between health research, health care practice and health policy formulation and implementation in particular.

Students will develop research skills through introduction to, and critical appraisal of, the methodological approaches, methods and tools related to PHHSR. The course content has been



designed by recognised experts in the field of PHHSR from, TCD, RCSI and UCC, specifically to offer health system professionals and researchers the opportunity to develop a high level of PHHSR literacy with a focus on the Irish context in an international setting.

The Diploma will be delivered online via a combination of interactive lectures, discussion forums, webinars and reflection activities. It will commence with a one-day face-to-face Orientation Session and conclude with a one-day face-to-face Integration Session with the aims of ensuring positive student learning, experience and course completion. The moderated online delivery will provide employed students with the flexibility to engage with self-paced coursework and exploratory and self-directed learning. Guidance and support will be offered by the Course Director/s, Module Lead/s and Learning Technologists (based in TCD, RCSI and UCC) in the form of live webinars, online discussion forums and feedback on activities/assignments.

Further information on how to apply for the Online Postgraduate Diploma in PHHSR will be available from April 13th 2017 on the SPHeRE Website and will be distributed across the SPHeRE Network. In the meantime if you have any queries, contact ciaranmccarthy@rcsi.ie.

Late last year we announced the launch of the SPHeRE Blog. We hope you, the network, are finding it useful and would like to encourage you to contribute new content and ideas.

The aim of the Blog is to add to discussion on issues in the area of public health and health services research. It focuses on topics ranging from public health policy formation and deliberation to health services practice and population health research. Blog posts are provided by contributors from across the SPHeRE network and beyond and include:

- *Volume and outcome in Irish cardiac care* - Prof. John Browne, UCC Dept. of Epidemiology and Public Health
- *Preventing suicide and self-harm: What works?* - Prof. Ella Arensman, Director of Research, National Suicide Research Foundation
- *Copayments for prescription medicines: Cens-ible policies?* - Dr Sarah-Jo Sinnott, Post-Doctoral Fellow, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
- *Ireland's cigarette taxes: A model for the United States* - Dr Christopher Seitz, Fulbright Scholar, UCC t of Epidemiology and Public Health
- *Barriers To And Facilitators Of Implementing Complex Workplace Dietary Interventions* - Dr Sarah Fitzgerald, Post-Doctoral Researcher, Food Choice at Work
- *Using Assistive Technology To Support Therapeutic Interventions With People With Dementia* - Dr Louise Hopper, School of Nursing and Human Sciences, Dublin City University
- *Lifestyle behaviours for health and well-being* - Dr Eimear Keane, Post-Doctoral Researcher, Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland Galway

We would be delighted to hear your ideas for topics or contributors to the SPHeRE blog.

If you have any ideas that you would like to share, or if you would like to contribute to the blog, please contact Martin Davoren on m.davoren@ucc.ie.

Meet the Team



Rebecca Kirrane, SPHeRE Learning Technologist

Technologist". I design and deliver the online learning portion of the Programme. Apart from the learning tech, I do general design work, collaborating with others across the SPHeRE Programme. I'm also the voice of the @sphereprogramme Twitter account, so if you're interacting with us on there you're probably talking to me.

Tell us a bit about your background

Before joining SPHeRE, I mainly worked with children teaching art, 3D animation and multimedia. I studied Multimedia for my undergrad, and I got to experiment with audio, film, animation and interactive projects. My final year dissertation was an e-learning project and I went

on to do a Masters in Technology and Learning with TCD.

What other career might you have chosen?

I'll still never forgive my mother for convincing me to take Model Making and Production Design off the top of my CAO list. If I wasn't a Learning Technologist, I'd definitely be doing special effects and monster makeup right now....or I'd just be unemployed as she feared.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I've taken up aerial hoop in recent years and it's currently my number one obsession. Think Cirque du Soleil but without the poise, grace, costumes, natural talent or years of training. And more bruises.

What's your favourite film/television show?

Probably Toy Story. It was the first film I ever saw in the cinema (which, in Ballina in the 90's, was also the post-office).

From time to time we like to give our network members a glimpse inside SPHeRE and an opportunity to meet some of the people behind the programme. This time, we're chatting to Rebecca Kirrane, SPHeRE's Learning Technologist based in the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI).

How long have you been with SPHeRE and what do you do?

I've been working on SPHeRE since December 2013, when I joined the team as "Learning

STAY IN TOUCH

If you'd like more information about the SPHeRE Network or would like to contribute to our next newsletter or the SPHeRE blog, please email Martin Davoren (m.davoren@ucc.ie).

For all the latest updates, follow us on Twitter @SPHeREprogramme or visit our website for more information : www.sphereprogramme.ie

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Spot Yourself?



Prof. Mark Petticrew, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine



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Prof. Mike Kelly, University of Cambridge



Prof. Ivan Perry UCC, Prof. Anne Hickey RCSI / SPHeRE, Prof. Ella Arensman NSRF, Prof. Kate Irving DCU.