



Global shortage of skilled health workers

Irish Forum for Global Health sets out priorities to improve workforce planning

THE INMO participated in the Irish Forum for Global Health International Conference which was held in the RCSI recently.

INMO President Sheila Dickson presented the INMO's collaboration with the Ethiopian Nurses Association to set up a Wellness Centre for healthcare workers in Swaziland.

At the Dublin conference, which was themed *Global Health Workforce: Pathways to Health* issued, the Irish Forum for Global Health stated that its aim was to contribute to global health by focusing on the needs of low-income countries, through networking and collaborating actions by the Irish global health community and its partners.

The theme of the global health workforce was in recognition of the critical shortage of skilled health personnel, which is one of today's greatest global health challenges.

The conference discussed the current challenges faced by the global health workforce. It reflected on experiences and lessons learned from research and practice by Irish and international practitioners, NGOs, researchers, government agencies and the private sector, which can inform responses in Ireland and other countries.

The conference stated its commitment to the principles of the 2008 Kampala Declaration and the vision of the Second Global Forum on Human Resources for Health in Bangkok in 2011 that: "All

people, everywhere, shall have access to a skilled, motivated and supported health worker within a robust health system."

The conference also discussed the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel and its implications for countries, including Ireland, in relation to better workforce planning, recruitment and retention, and to partnerships for strengthening health workforce capacity.

Ireland's membership of the European ESTHER Alliance was announced at the conference and will facilitate new institutional partnerships for building health workforce capacity.

The conference participants called for countries and organisations to intensify action on the following policy priorities:

- *Investment in the health workforce* as a key element of strengthening national health systems. They should provide coordinated support to middle and low income countries and align to their national health plans, priorities and employment practices. Middle and low income countries should allocate sufficient resources from their domestic budgets to adequately staff their health systems.
- *Partnerships, including scaling up North-South institutional partnerships* for human resource training, capacity building and delivery of services. Collaboration across

all sectors involved in global health in Ireland should be strengthened, including policy makers, researchers, practitioners and the private sector.

- *Education and training* – all countries, including Ireland, need to invest in health worker training to satisfy their domestic healthcare needs and develop coherent workforce plans. The capacity of domestic health training institutions should be strengthened to meet basic and specialised training needs in a sustainable way. Distance learning approaches should be increased so personnel can remain in their countries and communities.

- *Community-based responses* – need to expand the roles of community health volunteers, traditional practitioners, and other non-formal health workers and organisations; and integrate them into national human resource plans. There is a need to recognise the role that affected population groups (eg. people living with HIV, marginalised women) can play in promoting and supporting healthy communities and empower them to contribute to better health outcomes in their communities.

- *Health worker motivation and retention* – adopt strategies to attract and retain health workers with appro-

appropriate skills mix in rural and under-served areas. A gender-balanced workforce needs to be developed to ensure the health system is responsive to populations' needs and expectations. In addition, working environments and employment conditions for healthcare workers need to be improved.

- *Ethical recruitment and migration of health personnel* – Ireland should fulfil its responsibilities in implementing the WHO Code on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel. In addition, Ireland needs to commit to a policy of national health workforce self sufficiency and follow ethical principles when recruiting from other countries. Equal treatment needs to be ensured for migrant health workers. There is a need to increase initiatives in order to strengthen the workforce in countries with critical shortages of health personnel.
- *Research, technology and innovation* – stronger national health research systems are needed to ensure that North-South partnerships for human resources for health research involve policy makers from the South and are based on local needs. There is a need to research and evaluate the role of new technologies to enhance education, training and management of health personnel.



INMO President Sheila Dickson presented the INMO's collaboration with the Ethiopian Nurses Association at the Irish Forum for Global Health, which took place in the RCSI