

Speech by Mr Simon Harris TD, Minister for Health,

Launch of Clinical Research Development Ireland,

Farmleigh House, Monday 2nd October

Introduction

I am very pleased to have been invited here today to address such a distinguished audience and to officially launch Clinical Research Development Ireland – the successor to Molecular Medicine Ireland.

Importance of Health Research

Even though I realise I am preaching to the converted, I wanted to take the opportunity to stress the importance of health research. It is a key factor in promoting the health of the population, combating disease, reducing disability and improving the quality of care. It is fundamental to the effective and efficient delivery of health services. It brings learning from international best practice and appropriate evaluation techniques and application.

Knowledge derived from research is paramount in providing the evidence-base for better health policies, practices and systems. This evidence is essential to the creation of a fairer, more efficient health system and for the delivery of better health outcomes.

Health research provides us with the evidence to address key challenges in our society - radical demographic change, an ageing population, increases in the number of people living with chronic diseases, the spiralling cost of providing healthcare services and medication, greater demand from citizens for higher quality and more personalised care and greater need to shift investment from acute to primary, community and self-managed care.

There is strong international evidence that a research-informed health system with a research-aware workforce ultimately results in better outcomes for patients. Every treatment, medical device, procedure or policy available in our health service was developed from a good research idea that was proven and implemented in practice.

It is also important to note the important role health research plays in the knowledge economy, contributing to Ireland's international competitiveness and economic growth. The Government has recognised the value of investing in health research by showing a strong commitment in continuing to fund research throughout the economic challenging years of this decade. We fully appreciate the value of a strong research environment.

The establishment of Health Innovation Hub Ireland, as part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs is an important initiative involving many players, including the health and enterprise sectors and the research funding and enterprise agencies. Its aim to drive collaboration between the health service and enterprise, leading to the development of new healthcare technologies, products, and services is an example of what can be achieved with strong collaboration and shared understandings.

Role of CDRI

I am aware that Molecular Medicine Ireland, now CDRI, has been in existence since 2008 and provides a coordination framework for Ireland's medical schools and associated academic hospitals. This is a significant time in your progression. As well as a name and brand change the new strategy for CRDI sets out a strong ambition. I am encouraged that this includes support for endeavours which will help the development of clinical and translational research.

There have been many changes in the health research landscape in the last decade. The Health Research Board, which is an agency of my Department, has invested significantly to develop an excellent

infrastructure for clinical research in Ireland and in supporting clinical trials through dedicated funding.

Together, these initiatives have brought about a significant increase in Ireland in the expertise to conduct clinical research and clinical trials.

The platform provided by CRDI facilitated the delivery of many of these national research initiatives and infrastructure which have the potential to produce outputs that can be translated into improved diagnostics, therapies and devices for patients. Important examples include HRB Clinical Research Coordination Ireland; the Irish Clinical Academic Training Programme, supporting the development of the Irish input into the emerging ISO standards for bioprocessing, including biobanking, to name but a few

A key value of CRDI is its ability to bring together the medical schools and universities to act jointly on important and complex research initiatives and develop solutions on a national basis, such

While there have been significant improvements in the research landscape there still remains many challenges. Ireland is a small country and collaboration is critical if we are to continue achieving our aims. As a small country, a functioning clinical research system needs to be based on well aligned components working together to

provide integration of processes, infrastructure and people and I know CRDI is well placed to support this.

R&D Division in Department of Health

The R&D and Health Analytics Division which has been established in my Department is evidence of how it views the crucial importance of health research and data to providing the foundations for sound health policies, practices and outcomes. This Division is led by an Assistant Secretary and will play a critical role in supporting the Department to embed an evidence-informed approach to policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Leading the health sector agenda on research is a key focus of this new Division.

In addition, a Research Lead has recently been appointed in the HSE and I have no doubt that this role will assist in improving the co-ordination and delivery of health research in Ireland. This appointment is also significant in the context of important actions contained in the Action Plan for Health Research and the commitment to ensure that service delivery is infused and informed by the health research activity that is being supported through the HRB, the university base and our clinical research facilities.

Conclusion

Before I finish, I want to mention briefly the issue of the UK's decision to leave the EU. I know collaboration is key to ensuring high quality relevant research. This collaboration takes place amongst Irish researchers and with researchers in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Europe and further afield, therefore I have no doubt that the UK's decision is of particular interest.

Brexit poses a number of unprecedented challenges across all sectors but the Government is determined to achieve the best possible outcomes for the island of Ireland.

The key priorities of the Department of Health in addressing the implications of Brexit are to ensure continuity of health services and to avoid any changes to the current situation that would have a negative impact on human health.

In the health area, we will strive to ensure that patients' interests are protected in any new arrangements for cross border health services

and cooperation. It is important to point out that our door to Europe remains firmly open, including in the area of research.

I would like to thank the Chair of CRDI, Thomas Lynch and the CEO Dr Pat O'Mahony for the opportunity to speak to you today.

And finally I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank each of you for your important contribution to research in Ireland and wish you a fruitful morning.

Thank you.

ENDS

[After the speech the Minister will unveil a plaque which will be near the podium.]