

Health Psychology in Our 2005 Host Country

Health Psychology in Ireland



Carraroe, Co. Galway

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) has grown significantly since its foundation in 1970 and now has over 2000 members. The Society is home to four specialist Divisions, of which the Health Psychology Division is one.

Health Psychology Division and its activities

A Health Psychology Special Interest Group was formed in Ireland in 1987 (only two years after the foundation of EHPS), and the Division of Health Psychology was established in 2003, with Dr Brian Hughes, current President of the Psychological Society of Ireland, as its founding chair. The division was formed in response to rapidly increasing interest and research activity in the field from Irish psychologists, many of whom were graduates of the recently established postgraduate training programme in Health Psychology at NUI, Galway. This increase in research activity among psychologists was accompanied by a growing interest among health professionals in a psychological approach to health and health care.

The Division's primary aims are to promote awareness of Health Psychology in Ireland as a distinct specialty, to develop a clearly-defined career pathway for health psychologists in Ireland, and to promote and encourage research in Health Psychology and the application of this research to improve health services and the health status of the people of Ireland. The Division currently has nearly forty members and a nine-person committee.

Since its inception, the Division has been responsible for organising several training workshops (with topics ranging from health behaviour change in general practice to multiple regression and factor analysis). A significant activity for the division has been organising an annual scientific conference, there have been two to date: the first in NUI, Galway in 2004 and the most recent in Trinity College Dublin in April of this year. These conferences attracted around 100 multidisciplinary delegates each and are important in strengthening networks of people interested in Health Psychology in Ireland and beyond.

One of the main challenges facing the Division of Health Psychology is to develop a clearly-defined career pathway for health psychologists in Ireland and improve their employment prospects by promoting a recognised professional qualification in Health Psychology. There has been a working group within the Division set up to address this issue specifically and they are currently liaising with PSI to progress their aim.

Education in Health Psychology

The Department of Psychology at NUI, Galway was the first to introduce Health Psychology as a module to psychology undergraduates in 1990; currently all universities contain at least some Health Psychology content, with the majority providing at least one whole module in the area. At postgraduate level, a masters course - the MPsychSc in Health Psychology - was established at the NUI, Galway in 1994. Professor Ruth Curtis was the first director of the course; Dr

AnnMarie Groarke, Anne Marie Keane M Litt, Seamus McLoone (Senior lecturer, retired) and Emeritus Professor Martin McHugh also contributed immensely to the setting up and running of this programme. There are at present 56 graduates of this course, with 10 currently studying for the qualification.



Connemara, Co. Galway

Research in Health Psychology

The Psychology Department in NUI, Galway (<http://www.nuigalway.ie/psy/>) is a hub of research activity in health psychology, with current research focusing on areas such as psychological intervention with patients with breast cancer, stress and cardiovascular reactivity, immunisation uptake, interventions for behaviour change in general practice, health challenges among children and the impact of caffeine consumption on health. The Health Service Research Centre (http://www.rcsi.ie/Academic_Departments/Health_Services_Research_Centre/), directed by Professor Hannah McGee, which forms part of the Department of Psychology in the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland, is another important centre for Health Psychology related research. Research focuses on quality of life, cardiovascular populations, ageing, patient experiences of illness and health care and sexual health. Other organisations also host Health Psychology researchers, such as university Departments of General Practice and Public Health Departments in the National Health Service.

Employment of health psychologists in Ireland

A recent survey was carried out by the Division of Health Psychology to examine the career-related experiences of graduates of the Irish MPsySc programme in Health Psychology. Graduates were typically employed as researchers (39%) or as educators (25.5%). Only a tiny proportion of graduates were employed as clinicians. Those interested in more clinically based work reported that they felt it necessary to return to college to study Clinical Psychology, as they felt that clinical health posts were not open to them.

Ireland and the EHPS

Ireland has made an increasing contribution to the functioning of the EHPS. Professor Hannah McGee (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland) was Secretary (1996-1998) and President (1998-2000) of the EHPS. Dr David Hevey (Trinity College Dublin) was one of the founding members of CREATE. The 10th European Health Psychology Society Conference was hosted in Dublin by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1996. The Department of Psychology at NUI, Galway is delighted to bring EHPS to Ireland again by hosting the 19th EHPS conference this year. The conference is being held in NUI, Galway in recognition of the key contribution of the University's Department of Psychology to the development of Health Psychology in Ireland. Professor Ruth Curtis is conference president. Abstract submissions have exceeded all expectations so clearly a lot of people want to see Galway and join in the annual EHPS meeting. We wish all delegates of this conference a very fruitful and enjoyable conference.

Dr Molly Byrne

Chair, Psychological Society of Ireland, Division of Health Psychology.

Ireland Photos: Simon Comer