

## #BeRCSI Bulletin 2

Dear Colleagues,

As you are aware, enhanced Level 3 measures came into play at midnight for the country and three counties along the border are now operating at Level 4. Of course Dublin has been at Level 3 since September 18<sup>th</sup>. However, we want to reiterate the message that anyone who can work from home should please continue to do so. For example it is not recommended that you come to work if the only reason you have to do so is if internet access is somewhat slow in your area, or if you find you can concentrate better in the office. With the exception of research and student facing academic and professional services roles we would expect that you can work from home. Should Dublin move to Level 4 we would expect that research and teaching activities will continue – scientific research and provision of education are confirmed as essential services under Level 4 guidelines. We are reassured that we have built our on-campus teaching and research operations to adhere to Level 4 guidelines already.

No doubt all of us will find the new restrictions with respect to the ban on household and garden visits a challenge. We are supportive of these measures, given that much of the spread of the virus is down to small gatherings in private houses – including small family gatherings and playdates. Remember that restricting in-person socialising does not translate to restricting being social, please mind yourselves and reach out to others, both for your own health and also to give support to others who may need it. The RCSI community has shown tremendous resilience, strength and determination since the pandemic started, adapting to each challenge in new and innovative ways. If we continue to support and connect with each other we can get through the months ahead.

In today's 'Team Spotlight' our technical teams in PBS and Chemistry are sharing the essential work they've been doing over the last seven months. We are so looking forward to hearing more of our colleagues stories on how you have adjusted over the last few months:

### Team Spotlight

A timely reminder with Halloween fast approaching that Friday the 13th was the day back in March that RCSI closed the research and teaching laboratories for a then unknown period of time. There was a definite sense of uncertainty and anxiety in the air that morning as the technical staff worked together to pause the research in a safe manner and implement procedures for operating with a skeleton crew (Halloween pun!) to maintain lab instruments and facilities. Here we look at what the technical teams in PBS and Chemistry have been up to over the last seven months.

#### **Barry Holmes**

Director of Human Resources

The PBS Lab Operations Team is made up of Olwen Foley, Mary Ledwith (retired Aug 7th), Jim Slattery, Colin McElduff, Seamus McDonald, Sophie Cassidy and recent additions Emma Halpin, Sarah Lynch and Tara Hayden. From that day to this we went through time points; Phases 1-3 “safe return of our researchers”, June 29th/Aug 10th “further safe return of staff”, culminating on Mon Sept 14th with the “safe return of our MPharm students” and their first Lab Practical. This team were in the process of getting used to working together following the merger of MCT and Pharmacy the previous summer while trying to adjust to the new Pandemic work life balance. One positive outcome is they got to know each other very quickly both personally and professionally. Like everyone else in RCSI, they all had their own personal concerns and childcare/family care responsibilities. Each one of them worked from home and/or onsite when required with enthusiasm, dedication and collaborative spirit which epitomises #BeRCSI” to help the University get to where it is today.

In the Department of Chemistry, the technical staff of Suzanne Donnelly and Graeme Kelly have been working tirelessly since the initial lockdown in March to adapt the labs for continued research and undergraduate teaching. Social distancing, blended learning, flipped classrooms and PPE are just some of the initiatives introduced to ensure the undergraduate practical classes went ahead as scheduled.

Graeme and Suzanne have also recorded all the Chemistry lab practical classes and have created bespoke online interactive sessions in the event of a total lockdown in the future. This really was an immense effort on their part to have online-labs ready to go with the tight timescales involved and is indicative of the can-do attitude that technical staff have shown across the university especially in the face of the challenges of the last six months. Graeme, who should have been in Hawaii on his honeymoon in March, was instead on campus laying out floor markings, redesigning the layouts of labs, ordering PPE and setting up postgraduate rotas so that research could continue with minimal interruption. A very big ‘Mahalo’ to Graeme, Suzanne, and the technical staff across the university who performed similar feats.



**Barry Holmes**  
Director of Human Resources



## Winter Readiness & Flu Vaccine

For anyone who missed it this week, the myHealth lecture on '[A Toolkit for Winter Readiness](#)' is definitely worth catching up on. Prof. Ciaran O'Boyle from our new Centre for Positive Psychology and Health led a panel discussion on the importance of getting the Flu Vaccine this year and other practical ways we can look after our physical and mental health as we prepare for the winter months ahead such as ensuring to eat well, get out to exercise every day, stay hydrated, ensure we prioritise sleep and also to remember to laugh, it boosts the immune system! For those of you struggling to motivate yourself to get out and exercise, you might like to get involved in the RCSI gym team's *Challenge 150* which is starting next week and is designed to motivate you to achieve the minimum W.H.O exercise guidelines of 150 minutes per week for the 9 weeks leading up to Christmas. Follow [@rcsi\\_gym](#) on Instagram or join the Health page [here](#); the gym team will post the weekly workouts every Monday.

As previously communicated, RCSI will continue to provide assistance to staff in obtaining the flu vaccine this winter, which will help reduce the burden on our health system as it deals with the Covid-19 pandemic. In an effort to reduce the additional pressures that our Mercer Medical Centre clinician colleagues will face this year, **we are encouraging you to get your flu vaccine through your own local pharmacist or GP.** You can then expense the cost through the online expenses system, where you will just need to attach a picture of your receipt. [A guide](#) has been created for you with instructions on how to do this. Many of you will qualify to avail of the vaccine for free, if you are in a vulnerable group or work in a healthcare setting, you can view the full list of qualifying conditions [here](#).

A **limited number of vaccines** will be available to staff for free in Mercers Medical Centre by appointment only. This will be organised through the Inspire team as per previous years once this year's flu vaccines are available. At this point we are gathering expressions of interested for those who would like to avail of the vaccine through Mercer Medical Centre through [this form](#).

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Director of Human Resources

As we head into shorter days and colder climes, you may not be looking forward to the months ahead but what if we could change our perceptions of the winter months with some help from our Norwegian neighbours. [In this article in the Guardian](#), health psychologist Kari Leibowitz examines how the Norwegian citizens of Tromsø's not only survive through the long "polar night" but also seem to thrive, and her work suggests that it all comes down to "mindset". Leibowitz's findings build on decades of previous research showing that the mental framing of stressful events can powerfully influence the ways we are affected by them. If we can view a stressful event as a challenge and an opportunity to learn and adapt instead of as a threat, we have the power to consciously change how we perceive an event and improve our resilience to cope better.

### **Setting Boundaries**

One of the greatest challenges that we are hearing about from colleagues is that of maintaining boundaries between home and work life for those who continue to work from home. There is always work to be done and it can be all-consuming, our ability to be connected digitally can pressure us to believe we have to be constantly available. We don't.

Staying well in body and mind is crucial for us to get through this pandemic and that requires adequate periods of rest and disconnection from work. Each of us needs to develop rituals and boundaries that help us to separate personal and professional life. These may be small changes we can make in our day-to-day that will have a big impact: morning exercise, disconnecting for short breaks throughout the day, accepting that the boundaries won't always be black-and-white, and, most importantly, finding ways to nourish ourselves outside of work and connect to family and friends. Some points to consider:

1. It's important that we keep our availability up to date on our calendars then honour that availability when sending meeting invitations.
2. If at all possible please keep the mid-day period free of meetings so we can take a lunch break and get some fresh air
3. If you're a meeting organiser be clear in the invitation about what will happen if someone can't attend i.e. will you email meeting notes or follow up 1:1?
4. Consider taking a day's leave here or there just to allow yourself to rest or have a long weekend – and resist the temptation to check your emails when you're off.

### **Halloween at RCSI**

As the home of surgical training in Ireland who better to hold a pumpkin carving competition than RCSI! The HR Team will be hosting a pumpkin carving competition on Friday October 23<sup>rd</sup>, if you think your team has better carving skills we're up for the challenge! Get the whole team involved and involve the kids too. Post your pictures to the [Halloween Workvivo space](#), you might get some ideas from last years competition winners for the [Botanic Gardens](#) decorated pumpkin competition.

**Barry Holmes**  
Director of Human Resources



Lastly, Irish poet Derek Mahon died at the start of this month, one of his poems brought comfort to many at the start of this pandemic. It seems like a good time to remind ourselves that **“Everything is going to be alright”**

*How should I not be glad to contemplate  
the clouds clearing beyond the dormer window  
and a high tide reflected on the ceiling?  
There will be dying, there will be dying,  
but there is no need to go into that.  
The poems flow from the hand unbidden  
and the hidden source is the watchful heart.  
The sun rises in spite of everything  
and the far cities are beautiful and bright.  
I lie here in a riot of sunlight  
watching the day break and the clouds flying.  
Everything is going to be all right.*

Continue to take care of yourselves and each other,

Barry and the HR Team

**Barry Holmes**  
Director of Human Resources

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