

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS** delivered by **PROFESSOR DAVIS COAKLEY**, Professor of Medical Gerontology (in Trinity College, Dublin) on 6 June, 2008, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*, on **MICHAEL HYLAND**

A Leas-Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

It was William Osler, the great North American physician, who said to his students “*medicine is not a trade, it is a mission.*” We only need to look back through medical history to find individuals who have dedicated their lives to seeking cures for disease or to discovering new approaches to the sociomedical issues of their time. With pioneering vision, Dr. Michael Hyland, has devoted his life to establishing a new approach to the health and well-being of older people.

Michael Hyland was born in Yorkshire in 1934. His father Edmond was a Corkman who grew up on College Road just a short distance from UCC, where he studied medicine, graduating in the early twenties. After graduation, his father sought a position in England, like most UCC graduates of the time, and he set up a practice in Yorkshire. Michael’s mother Mary was also from Cork, growing up on a farm on Blarney Road. Michael’s parents maintained strong links with their Irish roots spending their holidays every year with their three children in Ballycotton and Michael has fond memories of these carefree days. The family was on holidays as usual in Ballycotton when the Second World War began. Michael’s parents decided to leave their children with their grandmother on the farm on Blarney Road. Michael was sent to school at the Christian Brothers College, or ‘Christians’ as it is more familiarly known. After the war, the children returned with their parents to Yorkshire.

The family moved back to Ireland in 1947 and settled on Orchard Road. In 1951, Michael followed his father’s footsteps by choosing to study medicine at UCC. After graduation, he interned at the North Infirmary and stayed on subsequently as senior house officer and registrar. He was unsure about his future career, so in 1961 he decided to do some locums as a general practitioner in Yorkshire.

It was during this period that he became aware of the ground-breaking approach to the medical care of older people being brought about by the new specialty of geriatric medicine. The specialty developed from the pioneering work of Dr. Marjorie Warren at the West Middlesex Hospital in London. Michael began his training in geriatric medicine in the Central Middlesex Hospital where he came under the influence of the charismatic Dr. (later Professor) Gordon Mills. After four years, Michael moved to the West Middlesex Hospital where he worked with Dr. Jimmy Andrews, another well known advocate of the specialty.

Professor Denis O’Sullivan was appointed to the chair of medicine in UCC in 1961. He recognised the importance of developing a specialised service for older patients and asked Dr J H Sheldon, whose book on the social medicine of old age was of fundamental importance, to advise on the care of the elderly in Munster. This eventually resulted in the first advertisement for a geriatrician in this country. Michael was appointed to the position and commenced duty in January 1969.

Three months after taking up the appointment, Michael married Rosaleen Crowley whom he had met at the Central Middlesex Hospital where she was nursing. Rosaleen had a similar background to Michael’s. Her father Dr. Patrick Crowley had graduated in medicine from UCC in the 1920s and was Medical Officer of Health in Tunbridge Wells in Kent.

At St. Finbarr’s Hospital, Michael gradually built up a multidisciplinary team and in 1972 he appointed his first registrar, Dr. (now Professor) Cillian Twomey. Shortly afterwards, Michael opened his first day hospital and he managed to persuade the Department of Health to build a new 80 bed rehabilitation unit in St. Finbarr’s Hospital. When the new Regional Hospital opened in 1978, it included an acute admission ward for older patients. One might ask, how did Michael achieve so much so quickly? He has ability obviously, but he also has an open and genial personality which, combined with his sense of humour, managed to open doors which others would find firmly closed.

Michael was appointed lecturer and examiner at UCC soon after he returned to Cork. He was a remarkable teacher and he set time aside to teach each morning. His clinics were some of the best attended in the medical school. Michael became a role model for many of the students and junior doctors in Cork. Most of these went into fields other than geriatric medicine but they are quick to acknowledge Michael's influence on them.

Michael Hyland is a gifted clinician and his knowledge of medicine is extremely broad. He has always kept himself at the cutting edge of developments and patients under his care were guaranteed to get the best of diagnostics and the best therapy available.

Several young doctors who trained in Cork were attracted to the specialty of geriatric medicine because of Michael's enthusiasm and dedication. Most have gone on to hold consultant posts in Ireland, North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. It is significant that four of the professors of geriatric medicine in this country were inspired by Michael to follow careers in the specialty and three of them worked with Michael as young doctors and were also his students. Michael, who is widely regarded as the pioneer of the specialty in Ireland, gave generously of his time to developing services for the elderly on a national level. Towards this end, he played a key role in several national societies and working groups. One of the latter produced a seminal report entitled 'The Years Ahead' in 1989. It is still regarded as the most comprehensive review of services for older people in Ireland.

The famous 17th century physician, William Harvey, complained in his day that few men above the age of forty seemed able to accept his discovery of the circulation of the blood because they had already closed their minds to new ideas. This certainly cannot be said of Michael who remains a perpetual student, always open to new ideas, absorbing them into his clinical practice when relevant and sharing them with his students and staff. After retirement he continued bedside teaching until his 70th birthday and over the past ten years he has been chairman of the Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Cork Teaching Hospitals. This is an onerous task and his appointment is a reflection of his energy and integrity.

Michael encouraged young doctors on his team to become involved in research and many projects initiated in this way were subsequently published in peer reviewed journals. In 1997, he played a key role in a large clinical trial being undertaken by researchers in three universities, the University of Leiden, the University of Glasgow and UCC. The trial demonstrated that elderly individuals at risk of vascular disease benefitted from treatment with statins and these findings were published in the Lancet in 2002.

Michael was one of the early members of the British Geriatrics Society, which was the first society for ageing in the world for consultants in this field and which has developed into a large international society. The society held its spring meeting in Cork in 1999 and Michael was awarded the President's Medal of the Society. This medal is awarded in recognition of outstanding service to geriatric medicine.

Michael retired in 1998 leaving a thriving department with five consultants on its staff. He is very highly regarded not only in Ireland but also internationally. Yet he never speaks of his own achievements or successes. He is a very private man who treasures the hours he spends with Rosaleen and their family.

It is most fitting that Michael should be honoured here in the Aula Maxima of his own university. Ireland owes him an immense debt of gratitude for his contribution to the health care of the nation.

*Praehonorabilis Vice-Cancellarie, totaque universitas.*

*Presento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Medicina, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.*