

OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN  
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS  
DELIVERED BY: **PROFESSOR DAVID  
KERINS**, Head of the School of Medicine,  
University College Cork, on 5 June 2009, on  
the occasion of the conferring of the Degree  
of Doctor of Medicine, *honoris causa*, on  
**MICHAEL BOLAND**



A Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus  
a dhaoine uaisle,

Dr Michael Boland was highly influenced by the experiences of his youth. In particular he was motivated by the very high regard that his father held for Michael's uncle, who was medically qualified and by the legendary Skibbereen General Practitioner, Dr Michael O'Sullivan. It was not surprising that following his medical education at UCD he returned to Cork to train as a General Practitioner in the newly established Cork GP training program and continued his training with Dr O'Sullivan. Following completion of his training he worked for the next 22 years as a general practitioner in Skibbereen, in a practice of four doctors serving a semi-rural community of 7,500 people.

The past 5 years have seen a remarkable change in our approach to medical education. Many of these changes have followed the evaluation by experts in the field of undergraduate and post graduate medical education and are reported in the Fottrell and Buttimer reports. However, as early as 1979, over a quarter of a century prior to the publication of these reports, Dr Boland proposed that existing continuing medical education for general practitioners be supplemented by small group learning focused on peer review and organized in each locality by a part-time GP tutor. With the support of the Postgraduate Medical and Dental Board he piloted the proposal as Tutor in his own area in 1981. As National Director of the Continuing Medical Education Network from 1986 to 1997 he directed a network of 29 GP Tutors serving 1650 general practitioners (75% of the GPs in Ireland) in more than 130 peer review groups. These groups were vital for the continuing continued professional development

of GPs, but also provided a mechanism to address the professional and other forms of isolation that are such a hazard to the middle aged professional.

Despite his creation of these structures for education and training, and his busy medical practice, he clearly had some free time on his hands. He also became involved in the foundation of the Irish College of General Practitioners. In 1984 he drafted the constitution of the new Irish College and became its first Chairman of Council from 1984 to 1987, a period in which 95% of Irish general practitioners took up membership. As a member of the Medical Council of Ireland he successfully proposed the recognition of General Practice as a specialty in medicine - Ireland became the first European Commission member state to do so in 1989.

In addition to his activities in the Irish College of General Practitioners he was elected as a fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners in the UK. He served as a member of the council of the RCGP from 1987 to 1993 and has ably represented the Republic of Ireland Faculty. He delivered the Pickles Lecture in 1991, a lecture that had the enigmatic title "My Brothers Keeper", it opened with a biblical quote and ended with a quote from William Butler Yeats. Not surprisingly, in view of his success in Ireland and in the UK, Michael next turned his attention to Europe. He was the founding Irish member of the European Academy of Teachers in General Practice and a council member for 20 years.

Having excelled in Ireland, the UK, and in Europe the next step was inevitably to take on the World. WONCA is the World Organization of National Colleges, Academies and Academic Associations of General Practitioners/Family Physicians. It was founded in 1972, with the aims of: advocating primary care, developing an academic infrastructure of National Colleges and Academies, and building a teaching, training and research agenda. Dr Boland joined the Council of WONCA to represent Ireland in 1986. In 1992 he was elected to join the World Executive. In 2001 he took over the Presidency of WONCA. At that time WONCA represented 65 countries. Over the course of his presidency it grew to represent 83 countries and comprised 100 member organizations.

WONCA has gained in many ways from Dr Boland, including his rendering of "The Rose of Skibbereen" at their sixth World Rural Health Congress—at Santiago de Compostela in 2003, which is now accepted as a classic. Anywhere he travelled he made the most of every opportunity to advance the cause of general

practice by enlightening the local government ministers. He also established and maintained contact with the “ordinary GP”.

A quotation from Dr Martin Luther King that Dr Boland applied in 2001, and one that remains relevant in 2009, is that “the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands at times of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy”. These words were applied in relation to the challenging issues of Tobacco Prevention and Cessation and to HIV Aids.

As WONCA/WHO Liaison he organised a 'Strategic Action Forum' on 'Making Medical Practice and Education more relevant to People's Needs - the Contribution of the Family Doctor'. This document has been translated into many languages and distributed throughout the world.

Dr Boland chaired the host organising committee for the WONCA World conference held in Dublin in 1998. This was attended by more than 5,000 delegates and accompanying persons. In this afternoon of record holders it is of value to recall that the Dublin meeting holds the dual record as the largest international gathering of General Practitioners ever, and the largest medical conference ever held in Ireland.

It is no surprise to learn that he attributes his success to the enormous support of his wife Susan and their three children. An inevitable consequence of his expanding sphere of influence and activities was an increasing travel load. I gather that Susan has become an expert at organizing Michael's travel needs, arranging his flight reservations and itineraries. It is also not a surprise that he has continued to inspire the latest generation of clinicians, his daughter has just graduated from medical school and his son will follow next year. His other daughter is pursuing a PhD in art.

Following his successes in WONCA, Michael has served as Director of the Postgraduate Resource Centre of the Irish College of General Practitioners. He has led initiatives in Practice Computerisation, Distance Learning, Secondary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes, Alcohol Misuse, Suicide, Men's Health, and Disease Surveillance.

As chairman of the Board of the Office of Tobacco Control he oversaw the introduction of the smoking cessation ban. The CEO of the Irish College of General Practitioners, Mr. Fionán O'Cuinneagáin writing in the current ICGP Annual Report stated that “In mentioning the early development of the College,

we think of the vision and initiative of Dr Michael Boland. Michael was the key driver in the establishment of the ICGP and in the many achievements both within the ICGP and the healthcare system, both at home and abroad.”

All around the world family medicine is establishing itself as the discipline central to the delivery of effective, economic and humane health care to communities in both developed and developing countries. In the last twenty years, the emergence of family-oriented, person-centred primary care delivered by well trained general practitioners/family physicians has been seen in many countries. Dr Boland has played a crucial role in the development of these concepts and approaches. His clear vision for the scientific and academic roles of general practice has been a driving force in establishing the depths of general practice.

He is held in extraordinarily high regard by his colleagues, both clinical and academic. He has played a critical role in the evolution of contemporary general practice in Ireland. He has also acted as a wonderful ambassador for Irish medicine. His influences on the advancement of general practice and patient care are recognised and appreciated on a world-wide basis.

**Praehonorabilis 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.**