

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **PROFESSOR JAMES BROWNE**, President, National University of Ireland, Galway, on 2 December 2010 in the National University of Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Medicine *honoris causa*, on **DR GARRETT O'CONNOR**

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

There are a wide range of reasons to appreciate Garrett O'Connor: for his profession; his principles; and his person.

He is an exemplar of an Irish man who has achieved so much abroad, while continuing his close relationship with every aspect of the land from which he came; the place of which he is made. Commitment and concern characterize his activities in medicine, culture and politics; and his work in these fields have had significant impact in America, Ireland and many other parts of the world.



Dr Garrett O'Connor is the President of the Betty Ford Institute - a leading centre for education, research and prevention of addictive disease - and is also Chief Psychiatrist in the Betty Ford Centre for Drug and Alcohol Treatment.

He is Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He has directed a number of innovative treatment programs not only for patients suffering from addiction, but also their families and children. In addition to a keen awareness of the effects of psychological trauma on individual development, he has demonstrated a lifelong interest in the broader cultural impact of trauma on self-image including the effects of colonialism and alcoholism on his native Irish culture.

Dr O'Connor has been a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association since 1970, and a recipient in 2004 of the first Conway Hunter MD Society Distinguished Service Award. In 2006 he received the Vernelle Fox Award of the California Society of Addiction Medicine for Distinguished Service to the field of Addiction Medicine.

Born in Dublin, Garrett comes from an Irish family that has distinguished itself in the fields of medicine, music, literature and politics. His great grandfather, Matt Harris - an ardent democrat and nationalist - was a co-founder of the Land League, a supporter of the IRB and the MP for East Galway, before he was jailed for urging the tenant farmers in his constituency to cease paying rents to their landlords and to shoot them instead!

Dr Garrett O'Connor received his secondary education at St Mary's Holy Ghost College in Rathmines, and Clongowes Wood College. In 1960, he graduated as a physician from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and later trained in Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland.

As an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins, Dr O'Connor founded one of the first Psychiatric Emergency Services in the US, directed a groundbreaking training program in Community Psychiatry. He also became Director of the Johns Hopkins Multidisciplinary Community-based Treatment Program for Heroin Addicts.

After moving to Los Angeles in 1972, Dr O'Connor introduced innovative experiential teaching methods for medical students at UCLA. He directed the West Los Angeles Veterans Administration Comprehensive Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program, and pioneered successful community models of outpatient treatment for addiction in Los Angeles.

In 2003 he was appointed Chief Psychiatrist at the Betty Ford Centre in Palm Springs, California, and, since 2007, has been President of the Betty Ford Institute for Prevention, Research and Education in Addictive Disease. In this role he is developing new pioneering policies and programmes for the entire family system affected by addiction. A key aim is to

help 7 - 12-year-old children from families who have been hurt by addiction. No child is turned away for lack of funds.

For the past 20 years Dr O'Connor has examined the role of malignant shame as an emotional consequence of extreme cultural and familial trauma, focusing on the ways in which this destructive form of shame may be transmitted unconsciously to future generations. In this work he has relied upon evidence from research on the intergenerational cycles of dysfunctional behaviour in families manifested by child abuse, alcohol and other drug addictions, domestic violence, marital conflict and family breakup.

More recently, Dr O'Connor has been attempting to apply these intergenerational models of dysfunctional family behavior to further understand the impact of culturally inherited malignant shame on larger populations such as, for example: Jewish and other Holocaust survivors; victims of the Native American genocidal colonization; and, in the case of the English colonization of Ireland, the Irish people as a whole.

Since 1984, Dr O'Connor has been a Senior Fitness-for-Duty Evaluator for the Federal Aviation Administration in the US, and for most major US airlines, in addition to several State Medical Boards and Bar Associations. His experience as an Aviation Trauma Response Consultant has included: the Lockerbie disaster when 270 people died as a result of the bombing of PanAm flight 103 over Scotland in December 1988; the crash of TWA's Flight 800 in July 1996; and the destruction of two American Airlines aircraft with their passengers and crews in the 9/11 attack.

As the principal expert witness for the plaintiffs in the highly publicized Exxon Valdez trial, Dr O'Connor's perspective on the evidence was acknowledged as a major factor in achieving the unprecedented jury award for damages of \$5 billion dollars against Exxon Corporation.

His careful, long-term work on behalf of the Irish peace process in the United States is significant. At a time when we are beginning to take peace on this island for granted we should recognise the long patient endeavours that brought us to this point.

Garrett O'Connor is motivated by compassion for the pariahs of the world, those who are shunned and blamed by society. His insight into their plight and his compassion for their isolation and suffering is what makes him the great doctor and teacher that he is. It is this gift that has made it possible for him to open the door of recovery and hope for thousands of alcoholics and their families. Much of his work at the Betty Ford Institute is aimed at increasing awareness at the professional, the public and government levels, of the stigma attached to alcoholism and how that socially sanctioned stigma in turn serves to close off desperately needed education about, and treatment of, this most damaging of diseases.

Dr O'Connor has been in personal recovery from alcoholism since March 6th 1977. He lives in Palm Springs, California, has two adult sons: Matthew and Turlough and is married to the actress Fionnuala Flanagan.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

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