

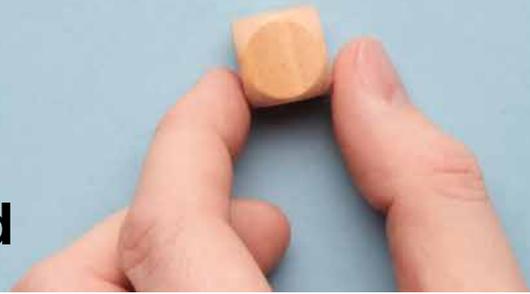
2021



2022

End of Year: IPHA

Lessons Learned from Covid



The pandemic should renew our trust in science for better health, writes Bernard Mallee

Covid-19 has taught us many lessons, most of them harrowing. More than five million people globally have died. The true mortality rate is likely to be much higher. Every day, the path of the pandemic looks increasingly likely to hinge on vaccinations - how many of us, wherever we live, can get protected against serious illness and death and how fast that happen. On their own, vaccines for Covid-19 won't be enough to stop the disease. They need to be allied with responsible behaviours like social distancing, mask-wearing, hand-washing and cough etiquette.

In Ireland, the vaccination rate for Covid-19 is among the highest in the world. Vaccine-hesitancy is among the lowest. It wasn't always that way. In January, one in four people said they either wouldn't get vaccinated for Covid-19 or they weren't sure. That figure has since dropped to well below 10%. Vaccination has been among the best public health interventions ever. It has eliminated smallpox, rubella and measles, among other diseases.

Covid-19 has taught us other lessons, especially about science. The world needs more collaboration, not less, in the discovery and development of vaccines and medicines to prevent and treat diseases. We need a policy ecosystem that generates greater investment in biopharmaceutical research and development, and encourages scientific collaboration among private companies, public agencies and academic institutions.

In Ireland, our research shows that the biopharmaceutical industry is considered favourably by the public. The role of biopharmaceutical innovation in finding answers for health challenges, and in creating jobs across the regions, is well acknowledged. In recent months, we put on screen this story of

economic and social value creation through a film-led campaign called Innovate For Life.

Along with partners Amgen, Lilly, Novo Nordisk and LEO Pharma, we created a series of mini-documentary films that captured the human experience of disease and hope through science. We explored four therapy areas - dementia, heart, obesity and skin.

How many of us know someone who has been affected by dementia? Alzheimer's disease, a progressive, degenerative condition that affects the brain, is the most common form of dementia. Dementia affects some 64,000 people in Ireland. So far, there is no cure.

What about cardiovascular diseases which account for 36% of all deaths in Ireland? About 10,000 people in Ireland die annually from cardiovascular diseases. Globally, almost 18 million people die from cardiovascular diseases every year.

Obesity, too, is a big problem, in Ireland and globally. About 60% of Ireland's population lives with overweight or obesity. Within a decade, the proportion of men in Ireland living with overweight and obesity will rise to 89%. For women, the figure is 85%. There are strong correlations between obesity and higher rates of mortality.

With one in three people in Ireland suffering from skin disease or disorder, many of us probably

know someone for whom daily living is a struggle. Skin conditions affect people physically and emotionally. Between 15% and 20% of GP consultations specifically relate to the skin.

These stories are hard but, in them, there is hope. Often, we can prevent or manage medical conditions through lifestyle changes like better exercise, healthier diet and more sleep. But medical interventions can be transformational, too. Between 1994 and 2013, five-year net survival rates for cancer increased from 40% to 61% for men and from 38% to 60% for women. Between 2008 and 2018, the mortality rate for heart attacks dropped 51%. The mortality rate for stroke fell 34%. Medicines made a major contribution to these gains.

Rare conditions, many of them making our children sick, are more treatable now than ever. In the past 20 years, the European Medicines Agency has approved more than 190 new orphan medicines.

Although all of this sounds like progress, we have a long way to go. We need to get faster at making the latest medicines available to patients in Ireland. We need to conduct far more clinical trials in our laboratories and build

a health data infrastructure that measures health outcomes. We need to find ways to attract new investments in cell and gene therapies across supply chain and manufacturing, and understand how best to adopt these new treatments at scale and pace in our health services.

We need to prepare for tomorrow's treatments and cures with newly skilled human capital and digitalised manufacturing processes. We need to make the research ecosystem work for unmet medical needs, turning Ireland into a place where breakthroughs in science can both start and scale. We need to protect intellectual property rights as the scaffolding for medicines innovation.

Above all, we need to place our trust in science in the battle against cancer, heart disease and many other chronic conditions. We need to arm ourselves against future global health crises. All of this is possible through partnership. Out of Covid-19, let us resolve to work more as a community to solve the problems that affect us all.

Bernard Mallee is Director of Communications and Advocacy at the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association.

Featuring in IPHA's Innovate for Life campaign is Zoe Ryan

