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Living for the Age: Excellence in Austerity

The Institute of Healthcare Management Northern Ireland Division held their annual conference in November 2011. The theme of the conference was "Living for the Age: Excellence in Austerity".

Explaining the concept, Stephen Hodkinson, IHM Chair NI Division believes "Managers have a responsibility to help shape policy and its modes of delivery. Their behaviours and attitudes are inevitably affected by the adoption and implementation of such policy and therefore their engagement in the delivery of excellence in times of austerity is pivotal to the achievement of an appropriate and quality service."

The conference featured various high-level speakers from within the healthcare service and also other sectors. While the morning session was a masterclass in ensuring excellence in austerity, the afternoon gave managers an opportunity to meet the media and discuss their, often troubled, relationship.

Andrew McCormick, from the Department of Health and Social Safety emphasised that transformational change needs excellent leadership and that we must not ignore the energy and creativity within the healthcare sector, which can be used to its advantage.

Jim Easton, Director of Improvement and Efficiency, Department of Health, stressed that managers have a fundamental purpose but that is not talked about enough. A key to success is remembering our passion for healthcare.

Charles Normand, a Professor of health policy and management, was clear that health managers need to change their mindsets, "the way we think about institutions needs to change. We think in terms of furniture, we think in terms of capacity rather than efficiency." He believes that there are numerous ways of increasing efficiency while maintaining and improving quality, including cross-training staff so they can do multiple tasks. This allows one person to deal with a patient rather than three separate staff members; beneficial for both patient and staff.

The "Media Meet the Managers" session was a great opportunity for an open dialogue between two, often conflicting, groups. Talking to the media is an integral part of a health manager's role and is especially important due to the significant change in media landscape thanks to the Internet. Quintin Oliver from Strategem, a public affairs agency, explained that managers are often only reactive with the media, they do not set the agenda. He stressed the importance of managing relationships with the media and politicians.

Print and broadcast journalists also gave their opinions and took questions from the floor. They emphasised the importance of access: this allows the story to be told. Journalists want to meet with patients and talk to managers/those involved. If you do not cooperate, your side of the story will remain untold.

For more information on the IHM NI Division, please visit: www.ihm.org.uk/divisions_and_regions/northern_ireland

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