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National

Turning The Tide: Resetting The Course Of Health And Social Care In Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland division of the Institute of Healthcare Management met in November of this year in the iconic surroundings of Titanic Belfast to discuss how best to cope with current changes within the sector. An international affair, presenters came from Wales, Ireland and Europe to show delegates different processes of change. Key issues raised centred around quality, the importance of leadership, meaningful change and creativity.

One important outcome from the conference was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Northern Ireland Health Minister, Edwin Poots and Rafael Bengoa, Regional Minister of Health and Consumer Affairs in the Basque Government. The administrations have developed a strong working relationship meeting in Brussels and Bilbao. A study group from the Basque country also attended the conference. Poots said both Ministers understood that their devolved administrations faced similar challenges of ageing populations and limited budgets. He said the MOU offered both regions an opportunity to draw on each other's experiences and expertise and added that international collaboration would ensure patients get the best possible care.

"In May, Dr Bengoa's administration and my Department agreed to work together to tackle the common challenges facing our healthcare systems. We agreed to strengthen links between health, science and industry and to improve learning on systems and health technologies across our two regions. We also recognised that closer co-operation in this area has the potential to unlock key European Union healthcare funding."

The Memorandum of Understanding focuses on closer cooperation on Connected Health and Social Care between Northern Ireland and the Basque Region. It has five themes, which are:

- To promote a think tank for policy development;
- To facilitate learning networks;
- To develop the two regions as living laboratories for research;
- To explore scope for innovate public procurement; and
- To establish an evaluation network.

Speaking to delegates at the gala dinner, Mr Poots spoke of his determination to drive through the reform of health and social care to deliver better outcomes for all service users. He stressed the vital role healthcare managers have to play in delivering change by providing leadership. Mr Poots told delegates he expected them to challenge, advise, communicate and guide where appropriate. He said that change is vital and that it should not be feared and urged collaboration between healthcare institutions and the government, "change is rarely best achieved by top down imposition. Rather change needs to be discussed and debated so that the views of all those affected can be taken into account."

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