

Launch of the National College of Healthcare

Education 21/01/10

I am delighted to be here with you this evening to celebrate the launch of the **National College for Healthcare Education** and I would like to thank Fran Whelan and Detta Fanning for their kind invitation to be here with you this evening.

As Minister, I have specific responsibility for the Office for Older People. This Office shows most clearly the commitment of the Government to enhancing the lives of our senior citizens. My aim is to ensure that the vision of a unified approach to the challenges and opportunities presented by our ageing population is realized, and that older people receive the maximum support and encouragement to enhance their lives and to continue enriching society.

The overarching aim of Government policy is to help older people to remain at home and in their communities for as long as possible. Where this is not feasible, for whatever reason, we then help ensure access to high quality, modern long term residential care. I am happy to be able to say that, notwithstanding the severe overall economic difficulties facing the country at the moment, we provided an additional €10 million in the recent Budget to expand the Home Care Package Initiative nationally.

In November of last year I published an evaluation of the home care package initiative. The HSE is already working on the implementation of the key recommendations of the report and is in ongoing discussions with my Department on these. Having national standardized guidelines for the Operation of the Home Care Package Scheme is a priority for the Executive in this context.

The HSE is also finalizing work in relation to the development of Home Care Quality Guidelines, and in relation to Home Help/Support services, which it has been working on with voluntary and private providers and will introduce these as a key component of service delivery this year. The training and development of staff working in this area is of vital importance. Therefore, I am delighted to see that one of the courses offered by the NCHE is in Home Care Skills.

I am sure you are all aware by now that the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, “A Fair Deal” commenced on 27 October 2009. The introduction of this scheme will provide peace of mind to one of the most vulnerable groups in society — those in need of long-term nursing home care — that such care will be affordable, and will remain affordable, for as long as they need it.

The Fair Deal will equalize State support for public and private long-term care recipients. It will ensure that there is one, transparent system of support towards the cost of care that will be fair to all, irrespective of whether they are in public, private or voluntary nursing homes. It also aims to render long-term care affordable and anxiety-free, and ensure that no-one has to sell their home during their lifetime to pay for their care. The Budget has provided an additional €97 million to support the full-year costs of the new Nursing Homes Support Scheme in 2010. This funding, which is in addition to the €55 million provided for the scheme in 2009, takes account of anticipated growth in the numbers needing care as a result of demographic trends and should enable the successful implementation of the scheme this year.

You will also be aware that in July of last year the National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings came into force. These gave the Chief Inspector of Social Services the power to inspect all designated centers for older people. Older people who can no longer live in the community because of their high levels of dependency and complex care needs can have the reassurance that the care they are given, and the environment they live in, will have to meet the highest standards. Again from pursuing the NCHE brochure I note that there is a valuable course available in Nursing Homecare Skills.

of the priorities of my Office is to develop a Strategy for Positive Ageing. My goal is to develop a meaningful and innovative strategy that will result in real improvements in the lives of older people. The new Strategy will cover all the main issues relevant to older people and not just focus on the health, and personal social services, areas. It will concentrate on a broader range of issues, highlighting the participation of older people across society and the ways in which relevant programmes and services are organized. These include, for example, income, housing, transport, education and employment.

Last June, I called for submissions on the new Strategy. This is the first time that there has been such a wide-ranging consultation between Government and older people about matters that affect them. The closing date for the public consultation process was 24 September last. We received over 180 submissions and considerable work has been undertaken in analyzing these. I intend that the Strategy will be progressed as quickly as possible.

In this changed economic climate, all sections of society need to join together to share resources, skills, and knowledge, as we work to create a better society based on values and community. I would like to congratulate all those associated with the NCHE and to thank you once again for your warm welcome here today. I would like to wish you all continued success in the future as we work together to improve the lives of older people.