Seirbhísí Comhoínnte Sláinte an Oirthir
Eastern Health Shared Services works with health agencies in the Eastern Region including:

- Eastern Regional Health Authority
- East Coast Area Health Board
- Northern Area Health Board
- South Western Area Health Board

The range of services provided include:

- Architectural Services
- Property Services
- Employee Services
- Financial Services
- Information Communication and Technology
- Procurement and Materials Management
Inside this issue . . .

6. Work life Balance – We examine some family friendly policies, focusing specifically on Job Sharing and talk to the people in EHSS who are job sharing.

12. Safety Statement Launch – We have an overview of European Week for Health and Safety at Work.


18. Astra Theatre Group – The EHB Astra Theatre Group are planning a reunion early in the new year, Michael Hanratty reflects over its 30 years.

16. Competitions – Win tickets to Santa’s Kingdom, WWF Allstars, or Apres Match. Plus, the opportunity to win a CD Walkman and a DVD Player.
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Developments at EHSS

As we come towards the end of 2002 we can reflect on the various developments to EHSS and look at our current position.

While significant progress has been made on a number of fronts in EHSS it is now timely to consider how EHSS should develop over the coming years. With this in mind an exercise is currently underway to develop a strategic plan for EHSS. Key stakeholders, including staff representatives, will be involved in the development of this strategy, the initial phase of which is scheduled for completion by Christmas.

We have begun new funding arrangements with the ERHA and AHB’s which involves invoicing on a regular basis for services provided and providing detailed Statements of Services. This new system provides EHSS with the opportunity to make visible in quantitative and qualitative terms, the value of the services we provide and will also bring recognition to the depth, breadth and complexity of what we do here.

Financial Services and Planning and Operations are now fully operational in Block D, Parkgate Street Business Centre where we are occupying three floors in the complex.

A pilot project to introduce e-working in the health services is currently being planned by and for implementation in EHSS. In order to gain valuable assistance and experience of other organisations that have successfully implemented e-working projects, EHSS has joined in partnership with Eircom and the Department of Finance in a joint pilot project, which will be sponsored by the National Framework Committee, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Other partners involved in the project include IMPACT and the Communications Workers Union (CWU). See page 8 for more information.

Message from the Editor

Welcome to the third and Christmas edition of Shared News. Articles in this edition include, a focus on Family Friendly Policies such as Job Sharing, the new ICT Interview Video link facility, News from around the Area Health Boards, a focus on NHS developments in Shared Services, a feature on the DUMP Project in the SWAHB, a two page spread of events around EHSS such as the IDA Shared Services Forum the launch of the EHSS Safety Statement, the Move to Parkgate Street and the launch of the new Training and Development Centre in St. Mary’s Hospital.

As with the last edition there is a mix of corporate news and social news for instance we have an article on Santry Sportslink, the EHB Astra Theatre Group which is planning a reunion in the new year, a feature on the Special Olympics who are looking for volunteers and plenty of competitions to win prizes such as tickets to Santa’s Kingdom, WWF All stars, a DVD Player and Personal CD player.

As always your input and feedback is essential to making this newsletter an interesting read. Your views, ideas and comments are always welcome. I would like to thank everybody who contributed to this edition of Shared News for their support and I hope you enjoy the articles. If anybody has any articles that you feel might be of interest to your colleagues either in a work or social capacity please feel free to submit them to the Communications Department at the details below.

Finally, I would like to extend a warm welcome to Patricia Gill, who is back from maternity leave.

Deirdre O’Riordan, Communications Department,
Eastern Health Shared Services, Parkgate Street Business Centre, Dublin 2.

Telephone: 01 6352885

Email: patricia.gill@ehss.ie
deirdre.oriodan@ehss.ie
During July 2002 ICT and Recruitment came together to hold the first EHSS Interview Video link for our customers in the East Coast Area Health Board. The ECAHB Communications Department, who were interviewing for their new Communications Officer, were anxious to interview a particular candidate in Australia. The Recruitment Department decided to try and facilitate this as far as was possible, enter ICT Services Telecommunications Unit in the guise of John Graham who set up the technology needed to conduct the interview from Dublin to the candidate in Australia.

The Boardroom in Dr. Steevens’ Hospital was allocated as the interview room and Miriam Keegan, Nial Sherry and Alison Doyle from Recruitment organised the layout of the room and the backup needed for the Interview Board. The Video-Conference equipment was moved quickly into position in the boardroom. This was possible because the unit is a V-Tel Mobile unit that can be relocated to any part of Dr Steevens’ Hospital, once there is a sufficient number of free telephony cable pairs to support the ISDN channels.

**Interview Video Link**

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**The History**

This equipment was purchased in the mid 90’s when a request was received from Health Promotions to provide a system to televise seminars from Dr Steevens’ to a number of other locations throughout the country. “At this time ISDN and Video Conferencing technology was relatively new, and we only transmitted the signal on two channels which frequently broke down. In spite of this we did manage to accommodate the Health Promotions and since then we have linked up to Cappagh Hospital for the ERHA, allowing staff in Dr Steevens to participate in a Seminar in their lecture hall.”

John Graham, Data Communications

Since then ICT have come quite a long way and have gained experience with every link. The system has improved so much that we can now provide a good quality link for interviews and Seminars, both transmitted from Dr Steevens or to Dr Steevens from any part of the world.

**How it works**

The system has two-camera positions that will allow us to operate both cameras on the same link switching from one to the other to transmit a picture or document. If we are receiving a transmission from another location and we need to use two rooms, the signal can be transmitted to both room. The system uses a standard digital T.V. as the monitor but for incoming seminars, we can and have linked up the main screen in the boardroom in Dr Steevens however often the audio system in the boardroom has proved too weak in the past to cope with this.

At the moment the boardroom in Dr. Steevens’ is the only location that can facilitate this system and as it is in such demand, will often not be available without prior notice. In time we may have a dedicated Videoconference room that can be booked by our customers in the ERHA and three Area Boards.

However in the meantime the trial of this system proved to be very successful “the interview went very smoothly and was a great testimony to the skill and innovative nature of the ICT staff” commented Alex Connolly, Director of Communications, ECAHB. ICT are now expanding into the area of teleconferencing independently of Eircom and Esat. 4th October saw the first International Teleconference between Morocco, England and Ireland in the Boardroom.

**New Director of ICT Services appointed at EHSS**

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. Tony Carroll as Director of ICT Services, Eastern Health Shared Services.

ICT Services is the largest Healthcare ICT services provider in Ireland and offers an extensive portfolio of services across its Enterprise, Healthcare, Office Systems Technology and Data Centre Divisions. Key focal areas currently include E-Services, Knowledge Management, Business Intelligence and adding value to the ICT Project Lifecycle. EHSS client base includes the South West, East Coast and Northern Health Boards, the ERHA and other relevant agencies throughout the Region.

Tony joined EHSS in April 2000 initially as IT Manager and was subsequently appointed Acting Director in January 2001.

Prior to joining EHSS Tony worked in the voluntary hospital sector since 1970 including St. Vincent’s Hospital Elm Park and The Childrens’ Hospital Temple Street. He held a number of middle and senior management appointments at the Rotunda Hospital over a twenty year period including Head of IT.

Tony holds a BSc(IT) from DCU and an MSc(Econ) from TCD. He is also a part-time lecturer in DCU and an external supervisor in Trinity. His special interests include Healthcare Technology Assessment and ICT Strategic Planning.
News from the ECAHB

September has been a busy month in the East Coast Area – among other things, we’ve welcomed a new chairman, Clonskeagh Hospital was awarded a national award, we announced an Out of Hours Medical Service for Dun Laoghaire and a Relaxation room at Vergemount was launched.

Chairman Cllr Andrew Doyle has been extremely busy in his first month in Office, attending openings and launches throughout the region. He opened a new respite service for persons with an intellectual disability in Newcastle on the 3rd of September, which was provided in partnership by the Co Wicklow Association for the Mentally Handicapped Ltd and the Health Board. In Carnew Cllr Doyle received a warm welcome as he launched the Home First Project’s newsletter ‘First Active Adventure’.

It is anticipated that Guidelines for the Safe Administration of Medicines for Older People launched this month by Cllr Doyle in St. Coleman’s Hospital, Rathdrum, will benefit older people throughout Ireland. The development of the Guidelines was extremely comprehensive, involving consultation with over 200 health care professionals, a review of international literature, and an independent expert review.

The board’s 2001 Annual Report is now hot off the press.

If you want to find out more about what’s going on in the East Coast Area Health Board, why not pick up a copy of ‘East Coast Post’.

News from the SWA HB

Suicide Prevention Conference
The SWA HB hosted a joint half-day conference on suicide prevention with the Irish College of General Practitioners at Citywest Hotel, Saggart on 25th September. The conference was targeted at Irish GPs and other Health Professionals as statistically each GP practice can expect to encounter a suicide once every five years and the achievements of a yearlong project were presented to the delegates. This project set out to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a training initiative and information resources on suicide prevention for GPs.

Alcohol Awareness Campaign
The South Western Area Health Board in partnership with the community of Kilcock is running a campaign around alcohol awareness with the emphasis on safe and responsible drinking during the month of October. The project aims to pilot test the effectiveness of an alcohol awareness campaign in a designated community. The Board will be providing a free confidential telephone service called Drink-Line (call free phone 1800 38 38 00). This free phone number will be operational for six weeks from 7th of October until the 14th of November and is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Naas Hospital
Minister for Finance, Mr Charlie McCreevy, T.D., ‘laid the first Block’ for the final phase (Phase 3) of Naas General Hospital. When the new Naas Hospital is complete it will have some of the most up-to-date health care services in the country including the Pictorial Archive and Communications System (PACS). When the new hospital is complete the bed capacity will increase from to 138 to 279 inclusive of day beds.

News from the NAHB

Woodlands Park
Woodlands Park, a landscaped garden built by prisoners and prison officers from Mountjoy Jail for the enjoyment of elderly patients at James Connolly Memorial Hospital, Blanchardstown, was officially opened during September by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

Addressing 200 guests at the Unit in the grounds of the hospital President McAleese said she was delighted to be able to officially declare the garden open.

Youth Advocacy Programme National Pilot
A new service designed to support young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour and their families was launched by Minister for Children Brian Lenihan during September in the Northern Area Health Board.

Mr. Lenihan launched the National Pilot of the Youth Advocacy Programme which will initially be managed for three years in north Dublin by the NAHB in partnership with the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Youth Advocacy Programme organisation and Extern, a charitable, not-for-profit organisation from Northern Ireland with the support of the Department of Health and Children. Youth Advocacy is a non-residential programme, which will provide direct in-home and neighbourhood-based services to families with young people at risk of residential placement. The service has been tailored to meet the need of each individual child and family and incorporates a crisis intervention service.
Work-life Balance – Is Job Sharing an Option for You?

Work-life balance initiatives help workers in combining employment with their family life, caring responsibilities and personal and social life outside the workplace. These initiatives are not intended to be aimed exclusively at parents, carers or any one group. Examples include job sharing, part-time work, flexible working arrangements, career breaks, special leave, parental leave, flexitime and e-working.

EHSS is committed to making flexible and innovative working arrangements available to its staff. Humphrey’s, Fleming and O’Donnell (2000) suggest that such arrangements can play a key role in enabling the public service to position itself as an “employer of choice”.

In this issue we answer some questions about job-sharing and talk to a few EHSS employees, Emer Bolger-Murphy, Sharon Gorman and Yvonne Grimes about their experience of job sharing.

What is Job Sharing?

This is an arrangement to divide one full-time job or to share work between two people with the responsibilities and the benefits of the job being shared between them. The job can be shared in a number of ways.
• On the basis of a split week; (2&3 day weeks))
• On the basis of a split day
• On the basis of week on, week off

Good management and communication are essential to effective job-sharing and this can be assisted where the job-sharers can build close working relations.

Who can Job Share?

Job sharing is open to all categories of staff serving in a full-time, permanent capacity who have satisfactorily completed their probation. The decision on who is allowed to job-share is a matter for local management taking into account the needs of the service.

What are the advantages of Job Sharing for employees?

If you have caring responsibilities, reducing your hours can give you the opportunity of combining paid work and caring roles. It is a good way to continue earning a regular wage while giving you time for other activities you want to be involved in which make you little or no money. You can keep up your skills and be up-to-date with developments, rather than taking a complete break from work.

What are some of the disadvantages of job sharing for employees?

• You will earn less money
• You could experience less job satisfaction
• It is a common problem that part-time workers try and do a full-time workers workload

What is the position with regard to public and privilege holidays?

Generally the person scheduled for duty on the day in question will benefit. Under the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, Job sharing staff who work a week on week off attendance regime, split week regime (or similar arrangements) are now entitled to an additional one tenth of fortnightly pay in respect of any public holiday on which they are not scheduled to work. Job sharing staff who are scheduled to work on a week in which a public holiday falls continue to receive a day off with pay on the public holiday. Employers are advised to divide the public/privilege holiday entitlement equally between job-sharing partners where possible.

What is the position with regard to maternity leave?

The maternity leave arrangements will be the same as those applicable to full-time staff but at half the payable payment to full-time staff.

Can I avail of flexitime while job-sharing?

In some cases flexitime may be feasible to operate e.g. week on/week off. However in the case of a split day, the flexi system may not be appropriate.

Points to consider

Think about whether you have the right personality to share work between two people with the responsibilities and the benefits of the job being shared between them.

Emer Bolger-Murphy

Emer is a Grade IV in SAP HR. She works 5 days on 5 days off. Emer’s experience of job-sharing is extremely positive. She finds her stress levels at home and at work are much reduced and she has more time for herself and her family. “You have more time when you are off, to bring the kids to their hobbies and more time for yourself”. She also finds that she is more motivated at work. “When you arrive in work you are eager to work, much more motivated and energetic because you have had your days at home. At the end of my time at home I’m ready to come back to work. You are getting the best of both worlds. The only disadvantage is the reduced pay but when you weigh up your quality of life there is no comparison whatsoever”.

However finding a job sharing partner was a major headache for Emer. Initially she had hoped to email all staff in the eastern region but this facility was no longer available. She did advertise on the EHSS Intranet but got no response. Eventually, through using a combination of fliers, faxes and word of mouth, Emer did find a job sharing partner. “My experience was that there was no help, you have to advertise and negotiate for yourself at the end of the day. If a database of people wanting to job share was available it would be very helpful.”
Yvonne Grimes and Sharon Gorman, Team Managers of the Medical And Allied Health Professionals Recruitment team, have been job sharing partners for over 2 years now. Yvonne and Sharon found it relatively easy to organise their job sharing as they both work in Recruitment. “You need somebody you can rely on that will do the work during your week off, somebody that appreciates the system as much as you do” remarks Sharon. As regards keeping in contact with each other Yvonne and Sharon keep touch base regularly and sometimes meet for an afternoon, or talk on the phone for an hour or so. In fact Yvonne and Sharon have become friends outside of work and their families have also become friends “I couldn’t have found a better partner than Sharon” says Yvonne.

Yvonne and Sharon have found that being job sharers brings enormous benefits to the job they are doing. Where one of them may have more expertise and knowledge in one area e.g. SAP, that is the area that they will concentrate on and visa versa. They are pulling on each others talents so that the job is being filled with twice the knowledge and two perspectives on problems that arise.

Useful websites
Equality Authority www.equality.ie
Equality Unit, Department of Finance www.gov.ie/finance/publications/main4.htm

Regional Library & Information Service EHSS News October 2002

The Library Staff of the Regional Library & Information Unit EHSS have been busy with a number of projects this year. Much of the development is taking place in the provision of electronic information, developing remote access to services and the implementation of the library management system.

Library Management System
The implementation of the new library management system – UNICORN has commenced and will be rolled out to the 8 library service points in the region. UNICORN includes a web-based catalogue, which will be accessible via the EHSS and ERHA Intranets. This access will be extended to all Area Health Board Intranets when they are launched. It is intended that the EHSS website will contain a link to the catalogue ensuring 24/7 access to the library’s holdings. Library users and staff of the 8 service points will be able to search all libraries holdings simultaneously. This will greatly enhance services to borrowers allowing remote access outside of library hours.

Intranet
The library content on the Intranet has been improved in line with the upcoming EStrategy. The new version includes online application forms such as Literature Request and Library Registration. These are sent directly via email greatly reducing paperwork and administration. Each of the 8 library service points has dedicated space for their news and services. The journal holdings and reviews of new acquisitions of each library are available online. Access to the current library catalogue is also available.

Access to Databases and Ejournals
The library is currently providing access to a comprehensive range of healthcare databases and full text electronic journals. This service can be accessed by users from the desktop with the help of a password assigned by the library. The areas covered include Medicine, Nursing, Mental Health and Healthcare Management. To apply for a username and password contact the library or fill out the database password application form on the Intranet.

Contact Details:
Regional Library & Information Service
Dr. Steevens Hospital, Dublin 8
Phone (01) 635-2555/8
Email: ehsslibrary@ehss.ie

Regional Librarian
Welcome back to Bennery Rickard, Regional Librarian who has recently returned from maternity leave, pictured here in the Library, Dr. Steevens’ Hospital.
Waste Management plays a significant role in SWAHB pilot project in Clane

The pilot of a project for the safe disposal of household medications began at the beginning of October in Clane in the SWAHB area. This project was proposed by Martin Rogan, Director for Mental Health & Addiction, SWAHB, Dr Denis O’Driscoll, Liaison Pharmacist, Addiction Services, SWAHB, Willie Roban, Waste Management, Eastern Health Shared Services, Catherine Brogan, Suicide Resource Officer & Mental Health Promotions Officer, SWAHB and Janet Dillon, Irish Pharmaceutical Union.

Most Irish households retain a large array of old and unused medications. Out of date antibiotics, unfinished prescriptions and discontinued medications present a significant hazard to children and those at risk of self-harm. Casual disposal can also pose a significant danger to the environment. With the consultation of Willie Roban, Waste Management Officer, Architectural Services, the DUMP - Dispose of Unused Medications Properly pilot project will address these problems.

The project aims to reduce the risk of accidental or deliberate over dosage by encouraging householder to return unused medications to their local community pharmacy. It is proposed to establish six pilot sites in the South Western Area Health Board, the first of which began in Clane on the 2nd October. Participating pharmacies were issued with a special container and promotional material and included on the Boards waste disposal collection route. Pre printed paper bags were also issued to the Pharmacy for distribution to interested members of the public.

Willie Roban, Waste Management Officer played a significant role in arranging for suitable storage, transport and certified disposal of the materials that will be gathered through the engagement of Sterile Technologies Ireland, Sharps Containers Ltd and Clinical Collections Ltd. in this project. In addition to this a database of material collected will be set up by Waste Management and analysis will be carried out to ascertain the nature and extent of pharmaceuticals returned.

This project aims to raise public awareness of three related areas; Self Harm & Suicide, Safety with Medications and Responsible Waste Disposal.

E-working Project

In Ireland today, organisations are going through some massive changes and improving productivity and flexibility are paramount for their continued success. The long-term success of any organisation depends to a large extent on its people - their level of expertise, commitment, creativity and dedication of quality and customer care. There is evidence to show that good people management has a direct impact in terms of overall organisation’ performance.

With improved technology and communications, telework (or e working) has become a real possibility for many employees looking for greater autonomy, more flexibility and an improved quality of life. In the long-term employers benefit from direct and indirect reductions in costs, reduced absenteeism, and increased employee retention. Society also benefits through reduced pollution, commuting congestion and the opportunity for people to contribute further to local communities.

A pilot project to introduce e-working in the health services is currently being planned by and for implementation in EHSS. EHSS has joined in partnership with Eircom and the Department of Finance in a joint pilot project, which will be sponsored in part by the National Framework Committee, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Other partners involved in the project include IMPACT, the Communications Workers Union (CWU) and the Public Service Executive Union (PSEU). The pilot is designed to cut across the private sector, public sector, and semi-state or semi-private sectors.

The timeframe for the pilot is 9 months commencing in August 2002 and concluding in April 2003. Staff will be nominated to the project by their Department Managers and a total of 20 employees per organisation will take part in the project, i.e. 60 participants in total. Training will be provided for all nominated employees prior to commencing e-working. It is scheduled that training will take place during November 2002 and that staff will commence e-working in mid to late November 2002 concluding in mid February 2003. This will be followed by feedback, evaluation and review.

One of the outcomes of the project is to design a comprehensive information and training pack for organisations wishing to implement a family friendly initiative in the area of e working based on the real experience of the project partners.
The NHS Shared Services Experience

by Caitriona Lyons

“Ultimately what we are trying to do is make a better NHS – because if the backroom functions such as HR, procurement and finance are working more efficiently, it will free up capacity, which in turn means more resources to deliver the NHS Plan.”

Jim O’Connell, Director of Human Resources, Shared Services Task Force

Shared services, as a concept, has been openly embraced in the private sector with many organisations, particularly multinational organisations (such as Whirlpool and Accenture), adopting a shared services approach in a bid to improve their competitiveness by eliminating the duplication of certain activities. This results in cost reduction and the attainment of better value for the money invested, as employees in the shared services centre (SSC) are able to concentrate on their core activity of providing support services to the other business units. Eastern Health Shared Services is the first organisation to implement a shared services strategy in the public sector in Ireland, the success of which, in its short existence to date, is expected to lead to the adoption of such an approach in the wider public sector in the future.

As the first organisation in the Irish public sector to adopt a shared services strategy, Eastern Health Shared Services has no peers against which to benchmark itself. However, the implementation of the National Shared Services Initiative in the UK’s public health system as part of its modernisation programme, will provide a useful benchmark for EHSS in terms of objectives, stage of development, the type of services shared, progress to date, etc. The following provides a brief description of the NHS Shared Services Initiative and how it compares to shared services as implemented in the Irish public health system in the Eastern Region through Eastern Health Shared Services.

NHS National Shared Services Initiative and Eastern Health Shared Services – a comparative analysis of shared services in the public health system in Ireland and in the United Kingdom

Objectives and Services Provided

The objective of the NHS National Shared Services Initiative is to change the manner in which non-clinical business support services are delivered, by maximising opportunities to improve the quality of these services while simultaneously improving value for money. This is being achieved through three major pieces of work:

Shared Services Development Project (including two Shared Financial Services Pilots):

These two pilots are taking place in the South West and in West Yorkshire. The centres will take the routine practices from finance departments in NHS Trusts in order to realise the full benefits of modern information technology systems, standardised efficient processes and the associated economies of scale.

Electronic Staff Record Project

This involves the delivery of a new national integrated human resources and payroll system for the whole of the NHS across England and Wales.

Finance and e-Commerce Project

This will enable national standardised systems and processes, and support new, more efficient ways of working. The project will select, procure and introduce a national system to be implemented throughout the NHS.

Like EHSS, the NHS Shared Services Initiative aims to enable the providers of healthcare provision to concentrate on their core activity of providing health and personal social services. The ultimate objective is therefore to improve the quality of healthcare services provided and eliminate the duplication of support activities resulting in a reduction in costs and increased value for money.

Information Technology

The three projects mentioned above are linked by information technology by using common systems across organisations. This technology enables the NHS to make better use of scarce skills, provide information services more quickly, efficiently and comprehensively and, reduce the cost of administration so that more of the available resources can be devoted to patient care. Similarly in EHSS, Enterprisewide Resource Planning (ERP) systems are used (e.g. SAP) in order to improve efficiency in, for example, the processing of invoices; in the dissemination of information to managers, and to improve efficiencies and create economies for client organisations.

Service Level Agreements

In terms of Service Level Agreements (SLAs), both the NHS Shared Services Initiative and EHSS are in the process of drawing up SLAs – contracts which will set out responsibilities, standards and charging arrangements; these will ensure that services delivered can be benchmarked against pre-agreed targets.

Progress To Date

While the NHS Shared Services Initiative and EHSS are similar in the sense that they are both implementing shared services in the public sector for the first time in their respective countries (in the case of the NHS it is the first time shared financial services have been implemented in the public sector in the UK while it has never been implemented in the private sector on this scale), they have both taken different approaches in doing so. The NHS has not yet gone live with its strategy (the Initiative was launched in October 1999) but is currently testing the feasibility of this approach through pilot sites and aims for the convergence of the three projects in 2004, whereas EHSS has been live since March 2000. A direct comparison in terms of progress to date is therefore not possible as a result of the differing origins of these two approaches. While the NHS Initiative has achieved significant progress – according to Philip Hewitson, Chief Executive, Shared Services Task Force “progress to date is something everyone involved with the National Shared Services Initiative should be proud of” – there is still a long way to go before the three projects in the NHS are fully implemented. Similarly, EHSS has achieved considerable progress since its inception “We here in EHSS have accomplished much in the development of the shared services concept within the public sector in Ireland so far and there is much more to gain by future developments” – Valerie Judge, C.O. EHSS
What’s happening in Financial Services

As Director of Financial Services, I’m delighted to have the chance to make my first contribution to Shared News, coming as it does at a time of great change for our department. The most visible change is our recent disappearance from the Dr Steevens campus. For those of you who lead sheltered lives, no, we have not been abducted by aliens, we are now well ensconced in our new accommodation in Parkgate St. Let me take this opportunity to thank everybody who contributed to this successful move, particularly Mary Brodie, Dave Allen, Architectural Services, Impact and most importantly the staff of Financial Services.

Considerable progress has been made in Financial Services in 2002 and here are just some of the initiatives currently underway within the department;

Current Projects in the Systems Accountants Office

Workflow & Intelligent Character Recognition Technology (ICR) Workflow and Intelligent Character Recognition Technology (ICR) Technologies are two software solutions that will have an enormous benefit to the way the Accounts Payable Department operates. Workflow is a messaging system, informing users that they have an action to perform and taking them directly to it. In addition there are other functionalities that can be provided i.e. forwarding items, creating attachments etc. Utilising Workflow and ICR to automate and streamline processes will allow the department to process payments in a more timely fashion, absorb increased volumes and focus on more value added activities. The Workflow Project is well underway and has been demonstrated to some of the initial users in Accounts Payable Department. It is planned to go-live for shared services with invoices initially and follow on by implementing across all Area Boards invoices. The ICR project is currently at research / evaluation stage. An image of an invoice is captured on SAP Financial System and immediately updates records and generates a payment to the supplier. The benefits of this system include comprehensive reporting capabilities from the desktop, reduction in processing errors, reduced costs and elimination of paper storage, copying and filing

Accounts Receivable

The SAP system can generate a receipt for the customer/client and simultaneously update the financial records thus eliminating much of the duplication of date entry in this area. This project is ready for testing by users in the Receipts Department.

Automatic Posting of Income to General Ledger

A summary of monies received by local Cash Offices throughout the Board is submitted to Shared Services for posting to the General Ledger. A project was initiated some months ago to automate this process, using Excel and E-mail and is now almost complete.

Business Objects

The Business Objects reporting tool, reads the data held on the SAP database and generates reports in tabular or graphical format. Already a suite of statistical reports has been designed. Development of our reporting capability is a key deliverable for our clients and there will be an on-going requirement for enhancement in this area.

Receipts Current Projects

Electronic filing of Returns

Early this year we introduced a new method of filing receipting returns to EHSS. Whilst the local areas that have co-operated with this initiative have shown it to be a far more efficient process, generally the response has been poor. Out of approximately 36 locations, currently only 8 are utilising this facility. We are currently contacting the remaining locations to adopt this method, which would have a direct impact on lead times for the monthly IMR, Bank Reconciliation’s and Cash Control Account reconciliation’s.

iBusiness Banking

Financial Services in EHSS have initiated the application of iBusiness Banking which is an on-line facility provided by our Bankers, AIB Bank. The three area Health Boards are registering with AIB to use this service.

iBusiness Banking offers comprehensive account information giving instant access to accounts held with the Bank. It is a real time banking system which provides an 180 day history having a complete picture of all banking transactions with the ability to view standing orders and the flexibility to search by date, cheque number or value.

The system also has a detailed breakdown of both credit and debit interest, overdraft limits and balances on accounts. In addition, it gives a comprehensive range of payment capabilities in a secure environment, including funds transfer between accounts.

Security standards involve using PKI technology comprising 128 bit encryption with integrity controls to ensure reliability and confidentiality of financial information. This will give improved service and time savings which will ultimately lead to reduced costs in bank charges and administration.

Ben Healy to lead new Service Quality section

Financial Services is delighted to announce that Ben Healy will lead a newly created section focusing on service evaluation and improvement. The main areas of responsibility will include:

Implementation of Internal Audit Recommendations

As a result of the establishment of EHSS audit committee, agreed audit programmes will be implemented. The ability to apply recommendations originating from such audits will be dependent on having a dedicated team available.
Implementation of C & AG Audit Recommendations
C & AG audits the Annual Financial Statements of all EHSS clients. As Financial Services plays a pivotal role in the production of AHB Annual Financial Statements, similar responses to that of audit reports will be required to deficiencies identified by C & AG in the course of their work.

Integration of Service Delivery
Identification of quality improvement initiatives will require analysis and evaluation of key performance indicators that are currently being established for the department. This will entail identifying inter-dependencies across sections and ensuring a co-ordinated and consistent workload throughout the department.

The Service Quality section will have responsibility for the monitoring of queries – this will highlight areas requiring improvement initiatives as agreed with the heads of sections.

Interpretation of Key Performance Indicators
Given the inter-dependencies between sections in Financial Services, the ability to take a broad view of KPI’s analysis will be a vital role for S Q Manager. This will necessarily involve close co-operation with other members of the finance team in order to progress to an integrated approach to service delivery.

Continuous evaluation of service quality
In order to gauge client perception of service provision, a liaison function with counterparts at AHB level will allow for a direct feedback on the level of progress of the S Q function. We are confident that Ben and his team will have a significant impact on service delivery for the future.

Expenditure Reporting By E-mail
Each month, Management Accounting section distributes copies of expenditure reports to line managers in EHSS and the Area Health Boards. Line managers, however, do not receive these paper-based reports until almost one month after the period to which they relate. Research has shown that managers in Irish companies want reports that are more timely and better formatted. It is fair to say that managers within our organisation share these requirements.

With this in mind, Management Accounting section is examining the feasibility of distributing expenditure reports electronically to line managers. It is hoped that this will allow draft expenditure reports to issue within two weeks of the month-end; followed by final reports upon completion of the IMR. The reports will be spreadsheet-based giving managers more analytical options, if required, to support their decision-making.

Other benefits of this development include: guaranteed and speedy delivery, and reduced paper usage.

National Fire Safety Week
“Get a Smoke Alarm, you can’t live without one!” that’s the message from the National Safety Council for Fire Safety Week 2002, which runs from Monday 4th to Sunday 10th November. 2001 was a particularly bad year for fire deaths with 62 fatalities recorded nationally. No smoke alarm was present in over two thirds of these fatal fires and the vast majority died in domestic fires from smoke inhalation. Tragically most of these deaths could have been prevented had there been a working smoke alarm in the home. Prevention is the key and all households should ensure that all potential risks or sources of fire outbreak are eliminated and that good fire safety habits are adopted by everybody in the home and work. The National Safety Council is appealing to all members of the public to install smoke alarms in the home during Fire Safety Week.

For Fire Safety Week The National Safety Council are encouraging people to carry out the following activities on designated days.

These include:

Monday 4th November - a focus on the instillation and maintenance of Smoke Alarms

Wednesday 6th - will encourage the public to get a ‘Last thing at night’ fire safety routine

Friday 8th - will encourage homes and businesses to carry out a ‘Fire Evacuation Drill’ at 12 noon.

According to Aidan O’Connor, Fire Safety Officer with Eastern Health Shared Services “So far in 2002, 36 people have been killed in fires, in the Republic of Ireland. Almost 70% were male who were living alone in basic accommodation without a working smoke alarm. The majority of these fires occurred between 9pm and 4am and could easily have been prevented by practicing fire safety habits”.

To anticipate possible risk of fire in the Eastern Region during the Christmas season Aidan O’Connor will issue Fire Safety Regulations in relation to Christmas Trees and Christmas Decorations in the Workplace to all staff. The display of artificial trees and decorations will be allowed as long as they are certified as flame retardant or flame resistant and are not placed near a heating vent or other fixed or portable heating device which could cause the tree to heat or ignite. Only approved electric decorative lights, including cordless lights, and all associated wiring, which have been tested, listed and bear the CE mark will be allowed.

Arrangements are being made through Central Purchasing to assist you in the purchase of Approved Trees and Decorations for the workplace.

If you require any additional information in relation to Fire Safety in your area please do not hesitate to contact Aidan O’Connor, Fire & Safety Officer, Architectural Services, EHSS, 26/29 Old Kilmainham D8; E-mail: aidan.oconnor@ehss.ie
EHSS Safety Statement launched during European Week for Safety & Health at Work 14-18th October 2002.

EHSS Safety Statement was launched on the 16th October at the European Week for Safety & Health at Work 2002 in Dr. Steevens’ Hospital. European Week for Safety and Health at Work is an information campaign aimed at making Europe a safe and healthy place to work. The theme of the week was Working on Stress. During the week the Staff Health, Safety and Welfare Department organised a number of events within the three AHBs, ERHA and EHSS in locations such as St. Columcille’s Hospital, Newcastle Hospital, James Connolly Memorial Hospital, Naas General Hospital and Dr. Steevens’ Hospital.

At each location there were stands throughout the day including the Irish Heart Foundation who conducted Health Questionnaires, Blood Pressure Checks and Healthy Eating plans.

New EHSS Training Centre opens in St. Mary’s Hospital

Training and Development opened the doors to their new Training Centre at Phoenix Hall, St. Mary’s at the beginning of September. In service training programmes which are specifically aimed at EHSS, ERHA and the three AHB’s employees are being run by our own in-house Staff Development Officers, Valerie Wade, Judith Maxwell, Linda Devlin and Christina O’Dwyer at this centre. Training & Developments administration services will continue to be provided at Dr. Steevens’. Both divisions are being co-ordinated by the Training & Development Manager.

The Training Centre is located on the ground floor of the Phoenix Hall complex within the grounds of St. Mary’s Hospital. The Centre consists of three purpose built training rooms, an ante-room, training offices and a tea room. Each training room is custom designed to be used exclusively for training purposes and is fully equipped with all the technical requirements such as overhead projectors, pc light projectors, whiteboards, flipcharts etc.

Click on to the Training section on the EHSS Intranet to find out more course detail or to book a course.

We would also like to welcome Stephen Dunne who has recently joined Training & Development
The Move To Parkgate Street

Financial Services and Planning and Operations, Eastern Health Shared Services on Friday 27th September packed up their boxes and with the aid of Beverly Smith moved to Parkgate Street Business Centre. Beverly Smith who won the contract to co-ordinate the move, were on site until 10p.m. on Friday ensuring that all the crates were transported from Dr. Steevens’ to Parkgate Street where they were distributed over 3 floors.

Many thanks to Mary Brodie, Planning and Operations for her hard work and preparation over the past year in co-ordinating the move. Special thanks also to Sean MacGabhann, John Graham, Dave Potter, Joe McManus, Michael Larkin and Pat Thompson for their patience in the ongoing organisation of the phone system in Parkgate Street. In addition, a thank you to Tom Gordon, Teresa O’Sullivan and her team from ICT for the time they dedicated to the move and Frances Kelly and Olivia Buckley for their work in setting up the line printers. ICT worked through the weekend to ensure that everybody was set up and ready for work on Monday morning. Also thanks to Christy Costigan and Carmel Cullen and colleagues for their contribution to the fit out of Parkgate Street.

To mark the move to Parkgate Street, an informal gathering was arranged for the Financial Services and Planning and Operations employees on Friday evening. A presentation was also made on the evening to Andrew Bridgett from Fixed Assets who resigned from EHSS to take up a position with Hetac. New address and contact details below;

Eastern Health Shared Services,
Block D, Parkgate Street Business Centre,
Parkgate Street, Dublin 8.

- Planning & Operations 635 2878
- Accounts Payable 635 2886
- Financial Accounting 635 2921
- Management Accounting 635 2928
- Asset Management 635 2919
- Payroll Accounting 635 2915
- Payments Section 635 2930
- Bank Control 635 2902
- Receipt Section 635 2938
- SAP Office 635 2954

We would also like to welcome James Fox the newly appointed porter at Parkgate Street.

IDA Shared Services Forum

IDA Ireland markets Ireland as an attractive location for overseas investment through its network of offices abroad, emphasising the stability and growing competitiveness of the Irish economy, the favourable tax regime, financial incentives, the skills base and Ireland’s active participation in Europe.

According to the IDA at least 30 leading international companies have located Shared Services operations in Ireland. Shared Services Centres can be a key component in their strategies to achieve enhanced efficiency and maintain standards of excellence in customer service. Ireland as a location for Shared Services offers companies a chance to reduce corporate administration and service charges by up to 44%, these cost savings are backed up by an excellent telecommunications network and financial and tax incentives for Shared Services.

On the 17th of September 2002 EHSS attended the third meeting of the IDA Shared Services Forum where Valerie Judge facilitated an in-depth workshop on Shared Services Organisation Structures. Other companies in attendance were; Accenture, Amdahl, Whirlpool, Lucent, and Deloitte and Touche. Issues discussed at the forum included, How SSC's are addressing Customer Satisfaction, Organisational Structure: Functional versus Country; Legal and regulatory environment for SSC’s: assessing the risk of non compliance.
Profiles

Santry Sportslink

Work is well under way on phase three of Sportslink, the joint Eircom/Public Service sports facility located on a 43 acre site at Furry Park in Santry, North Dublin and is in easy reach, just off the new M50 Motorway.

Phase three will incorporate a 25-metre pool with viewing gallery, a leisure pool, the first of its kind in Dublin. This will include a lazy river, flumes, water chutes and a bubble pool. It will also include new changing facilities.

Phase three will also see an extension to our existing Gymnasium, new Leisure Suit, Sauna/Steam room, and a new Members Bar, and more new multi purpose areas.

The cost of this project will be in the region of €11m.

At present Sportslink have over 6000 members and we expect this number will increase significantly the closer we get to opening day in May or June 2003. We would encourage anyone considering becoming a member not to wait too long as it may be necessary to put a cap on membership next year.

Sportslink have put a lot of emphasis on the family in the design of this phase of development. We have been aware over the years of the need to cater to the younger family members. This development will allow the entire family to come to Sportslink the younger members can enjoy a day in the pool and the older members will find a very extensive range of facilities available to them.

Membership is available for as little as €2.50 per week. This can be deducted at source.

For future information on membership, contact Sportslink at 018621200. info@sportslinf.ie

Appointments

We would like to welcome the following staff who have recently joined Eastern Health Shared Services.

Wendy McDonnell
Property Services

Niall O’Flanagan,
Childcare and Addiction Recruitment

Nadia Caira
Management/Admin Recruitment

Elizabeth Kinsella
Nursing Recruitment

Name: P.J. Hogan
Position/Area of responsibility: Looking after postroom, post, cheques, frank machine
What football team do you support? Manchester United
What is your favourite film? Braveheart
What is your favourite TV programme? The Bill
What book are you reading at the moment? Roy Keane’s autobiography Keane
What is your pet hate? Cats
If you could invite any three people dead or alive to dinner who would they be? Britney Spears, Samantha Mumba, Roy Keane
What is your favorite song of all time? Sunday Bloody Sunday by U2

Name: Martin Forde
Position/Area of responsibility: Grade VII, Financial Accounting
What football team do you support? Liverpool
What is your favourite film? The Odd Couple
What is your favourite TV programme? The Office
What book are you reading at the moment? I’m not
What is your pet hate? I hate pets
If you could invite any three people dead or alive to dinner who would they be? Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley because they are legends, and Gerard Houltier who is becoming one.
What is your favorite song of all time? Down in the Tube Station at Midnight by The Jam

Name: P.J. Hogan beside the franking machine in the Post Room, Dr. Steevens’ Hospital

Name: Martin Forde pictured in his new offices in Parkgate Street, Congratulations to Martin and his wife Edel on the arrival of their new baby boy Jack.
2003 Special Olympics World Games Volunteer Appeal

The health services support the Special Olympics in a variety of ways. For example, the Northern Area Health Board is providing facilities for a Control Centre at St Mary’s for the duration of the games. You may also be aware that the Games rely very heavily on volunteers. Applying to become a World Games volunteer could not be easier, the Games website – www.2003specialolympics.com has an on-line application form while a special phone line – 01 869 1700 – has been set up to take application details. Volunteer information leaflets will also be available in O’Briens Irish Sandwich Bars throughout the country. O’Briens Irish Sandwich Bars are 2003 World Games Sponsors and Sponsors of the Volunteer Programme for the Games. Following the completion of the application form, potential volunteers will be interviewed before beginning a special volunteer training programme.

While specific skills such as languages, computers, medical, sports officiating are being sought, there is also a huge need for general volunteers who are willing to work on a wide variety of tasks. From administration to entertainment, from language translation to safety, from security to transportation, altogether there are hundreds of different types of jobs that need to be done. Over the course of the Games, volunteers will be needed at nearly 50 different locations, and tasks could include anything from moving and setting up equipment to making sure that there are enough sandwiches and refreshments for all.

Adding his voice to the call for volunteers, An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD., said. “Volunteering for an event like this is never easy. Every volunteer will be an ambassador for Special Olympics, but they will also be ambassadors for Ireland. But every volunteer will leave the Games with new friends and memories that will last forever!”

The 2003 Special Olympics World Games will be the biggest sporting event in the world next year. 10,000 athletes, coaches and delegates will be attending from 160 international delegations. The Games begin on June 21st 2003 with the Opening Ceremony in Croke Park followed by seven days of competition at 21 venues throughout the greater Dublin area. The Closing Ceremony will also take place in Croke Park on June 29th.

If you’d like to find out more about the volunteer experience contact Susan Donnelly on 2719’

Christmas Website Review

www.christmas-stories.com
With links to anything and everything associated with the Christmas season, this is the perfect website to get you in the festive mood. This site belongs to Daniel Ciammaichella and features his own Christmas stories as well as Christmas legends, classic stories, and an interactive story where he invites the reader to add the next page of the story. Other links include e-cards, recipes, crafts, games, graphics, books, movies and links to a large number of Christmas websites. Lots of fun for the kids (and their parents)!!

www.christmas.com
This website claims to be the Internet’s largest Christmas portal. Highlights include The Christmas Shop where you can purchase Christmas trees, lights, ornaments and outdoor decorations without having to leave the comfort of your own home, and the section entitled Worldview which contains information on the ways in which Christmas is celebrated around the world as well as recipes, music and a feature providing the translation of “Merry Christmas” in a number of languages.

www.geocities.com/ewmpsi/christmas_shopping_online.html
Contains tips on everything about Christmas including online shopping, how to ensure you have a merry Christmas and how to write a letter of complaint about that unwanted, faulty or ill-fitting gift.

Christmas shopping online
The following two sites contain ideas on buying the perfect Christmas present and also provide links to sites where they may be purchased.

www.happychristmas.com
Buying for the person who has everything? This site contains an A-Z of links to a huge selection of ideas for the perfect gift in all price ranges. These links include American and international Christmas shopping pages with many providing delivery to worldwide destinations.

www.christmas-shopping-online.com
Christmas present ideas for everyone – men, women, children, babies, grandparents and teenagers. Also includes a “shopping directory” – a quick link list to great gifts, for example, books, clothing, electronics, flowers, jewellery, music, sports and watches.
Win 4 tickets to Santa’s Kingdom

Santa’s Kingdom (www.santakingdom.ie) the record breaking Christmas experience is returning to thrill Irish families again on November 29th, 2002. Last year an incredible 160,000 tickets were sold over a ten day period and with improvements on all levels, organisers this year are expecting a similar response to Santa’s Kingdom 2002. The Irish creation, Santa’s Kingdom, has proven to be such a phenomenal success in Ireland that it will now move further afield to the United Kingdom taking in an expected half million visitors at: Wembley Arena, London; National Exhibition Centre (NEC), Birmingham; SECC, Glasgow.

Santa’s Kingdom 2002 will touch down onto a new purpose built exhibition centre in Punchestown, Naas, Co Kildare, this new venue is 40% larger than last year, however with the same volume of tickets available per day (7,000) it will allow for a marked increase in space and movement so visitors will enjoy the experience all the more.

Lasting approximately two and a half hours, this unique adventure for the whole family, replicates a fantasy trip to visit Santa in his homeland. The Santa’s Kingdom Super Shuttle will depart from Punchestown and will land in the heart of Santa’s magical kingdom where parents and children will enter Santa’s realm through the Ice Cave and on to Santa’s village where they will meet all their favourite Santa’s Kingdom characters - The Ice Queen, The Grumpy Elf, Shiverrr the Snowman, Pepper the Penguin and Bernard the Post-Bear plus plenty of new faces!

Visitors can meander freely into the extended Santa’s Workshop as well as take a stroll down Elf Street, visit Santa’s home and as well as his Elf Schoolhouse to see where the elves learn their craft! Kids can play in the very popular Snow Zone, where they test their skills at making snowballs and can slide their way down the bigger and faster snow slides. Any visit to Santa’s Kingdom would not be complete without an audience with the Big Man himself and everyone will have the chance to chat to Santa. This is also where the children will receive their free Christmas present from Santa - but Santa will know if they’ve been naughty or nice!

The new exhibition centre at Punchestown is a permanent venue which means that all facilities at Santa’s Kingdom 2002 have been upgraded and will include:

- 62,000 square feet (40% larger than last year)
- Free supervised car parking for 4,500 cars
- Lively and colourful stage show situated in the customers departure area
- Expansions to Santa’s Village (which will include Elves Street and The Toy Factory)
- Santa’s Transporter to whisk families to the Kingdom at super speed
- New and improved Snow Slides with more lanes and faster speeds to thrill all ages.
- Improved snow play area

Tickets, priced at €24.50 for all days/times, are on sale via Ticketmaster - www.ticketmaster.ie or Telephone 24 hours 1890-925-100 (Republic of Ireland) and 0870-243-4455 (Northern Ireland).

We have 4 tickets to give away courtesy of Irish Event Santa’s Kingdom. Just answer the following question and send your entry to be in with a chance of winning tickets to this event on the 4th December 2002 via email to deirdre.oriordan@ehss.ie.

Where was Santa’s Kingdom held last year?

The closing date for this competition is 29th November 2002.

Competition Après Match

Want to win tickets to see Après Match in Vicar Street on Sunday 15th December 2002. Win two tickets to Après Match by answering the following questions and returning your answers via email to: deirdre.oriordan@ehss.ie by Monday 2nd December 2002.

In Après Match there are four main characters that they impersonate, they are Frank Stapleton, David O’Leary, Mick McCarthy and Eamonn Dunphy. To win tickets to Après Match tell us how many goals each of the above scored for Ireland?
DVD Competition

Want to win a state of the art Philips DVD Player including three James Bond DVD’s?

Answer the following questions and send your answers via email to deirdre.oriordan@ehss.ie.

Which member of Impact competed in the Dublin City Marathon in aid of the Children’s Cancer fund, Our Lady’s Hospital Crumlin?

Which important Health and Safety document was launched in the Boardroom, Dr. Steevens’ Hospital during European Week for Health and Safety at Work?

The NHS National Shared Services Initiative has introduced two Shared Financial Services pilots in two locations in England. Name these two locations.

What is the name of the EHSS Regional Librarian who has recently returned from maternity leave?

Closing date for this competition is Monday 9th December 2002.

CD Walkman Competition

Win this fabulous Sony Personal CD Walkman with Pre-set Radio and earphones by completing the quiz below.

Please photocopy the quiz, fill in the answers and submit to Deirdre O’Riordan, 3rd Floor, Block D, Parkgate Street Business Centre, Parkgate Street, Dublin 7.

Closing Date for receipt of Competition entry is 30th November 2002.

Letter Logic Puzzle

Across
ASH, DIP, ONE, YOU, ABHOR, BRAVO, HUMID, LEPER, OPERA, TRASH, AIRLIFT, BACCHUS, DIABOLO, EARSHOT, ENCHANT, FRANTIC, HECTARE, RASHERS, RETHINK, SHORTER, BIRTHDAY, ELEPHANT, HELPLESS, SHRAPNEL, EXCHEQUER, HOPSCOTCH, MASSACRED, SHAPELESS

Down
ADULT, AMBER, APACE, ASSET, DELIA, DOUGH, FLESH, HACKS, KAPUT, LARCH, MARCH, SHIFT, SITED, THAWS, ADORATION, ANTI-PATHY, POCKETFUL, RACEHORSE, SACKCLOTH, SHELLFISH, ARCHEOLOGY, BRIDGework, PARACHUTED, SKATEBOARD, BEACHCOMBER, MANAGEmENTS

There are no clues to this puzzle other than the letters in the grid and the length of the word or phrase.
Astra Theatre Group Reunion

Michael Hanratty looks back on the many memories of the vibrant and energetic Astra Theatre Group which ran for over 30 years in the Eastern Health Board and hopes for a successful reunion in the New Year.

A dramatisation of A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens has been staged with great success at the Gate Theatre during the festive season in recent years. What the literary world in general and the theatrical world in particular, may not know is that over 30 years ago, in December 1970, the Eastern Health Board's own drama group, The Astra Theatre Group, staged “Scrooge” a specially commissioned musical play based on the same novel. Over 50 members of the staff of the Board and St. James's Hospital took part in this production.

The group which I joined around this time was in its second reincarnation. Founded in the 1950’s by a group of staff including Eamon McManus, Joe Byrne and Laura O’Kelly its early productions were largely the work of Irish playwrights. Astra re-emerged with renewed vigour in 1967 led by Vincent Treacy, Kay Dolan, Matt O’Connor and Canice Mansfield among others. Over the next 30 years the group staged almost 60 productions providing a creative and social outlet for hundreds of staff both on stage and backstage.

From its foundation, Astra had as its principal aim the entertainment of hospital patients. Performances of all shows were staged in the Assembly Hall, St. James's Hospital, Bru Chaoimhin and the Royal Hospital, Donnybrook. The audience was transported to and from the show courtesy of our enthusiastic supporters in the Board’s Transport Department. The shows also went on tour to St. Patrick’s Home, St. Mary’s, J.C.M.H., St. Loman’s, St. Ita’s, St. Vincent’s, St. Colman’s and the Central Mental Hospital. Outings were also organised and run by Astra members for long stay patients and also elderly persons living in the St. James’s area. On a number of occasions Astra organised talent competitions among the staff of the Board and St. James’s. The depth of that talent can be gauged from the fact that in our 1977 competition a clerical officer in Salaries, Brendan Gleeson finished in third place. Brendan of course has gone on to a brilliant stage and international film career.

The standard of Astra productions was consistently high, competing successfully at drama festivals from Roscommon to Wexford and Navan to Gorey. Plays such as Witness for the Prosecution (1970), Anastasia (1973), The Righteous are Bold (1974), Blythe Spirit (1970), Home is the Hero (1977) and The Rape of the Belt (1985) all won awards.

Over the years the membership of Astra has come from the full spectrum of Health Board and St. James’s Hospital staff, clerical/admin, nursing, medical, paramedical, catering, attendants, domestic, ambulance, portering and technical staff. Many hundreds of people contributed in various ways from directors and actors to scene-shifters and programme sellers. In mentioning some people in particular I am aware of the danger of offending others not mentioned so I humbly apologies in advance. I feel I must mention the following people for their immense contribution in the earlier years. Firstly a number of people who, regrettably, are no longer with us; Martin Bugler, Brenda Kavanagh, Paddy Kavanagh, Eamon McManus, PDDY Melinn, Liam Sweeney and Bill Tisdall. Their contribution to the group as directors, on-stage, back-stage and at committee level will not be forgotten. Similar particular contributions were made over the years by Vincent Treacy, Kay Dolan, Walter Harrington, Canice Mansfield, Tom Brady, Margaret Power, Mary Shannon, Michael Cody, Joyce Mahon and Niamh Bowe.

Astra always had a vibrant social scene including after show parties. Trips away to drama festivals were memorable. Friendships were formed which have lasted for over 30 years. Romance within the group too has flourished with couples from Maeve Madden and Matt O’Connor to Susan Bradley and Mark Neville in the 90’s making it to the altar.

I have so many found memories of my time over 20 years with Astra as I’m sure a great many other members have also. Perhaps we might soon get a chance to reminisce over such memories. The indefatigable Dolores Kennedy is organising a Grand Reunion Bash for early in the News Year and over the next few months she will be contacting as many as possible of all those who have been associated with Astra productions over the years.

If you were a member of the Astra Theatre Group and you are interested in initial information about the reunion please contact Dolores Kennedy on (01) 8389574.

Christmas Recipe

Tangy Cranberry Sauce

To add a bit of zest to Christmas dinner and the sandwiches made from the leftovers add this Tangy Cranberry Sauce:

Ingredients (makes 30 servings)
- 1½ cups white sugar
- 4 cups fresh cranberries
- 2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon prepared horseradish

Directions


The amount of horseradish can be adjusted to taste.
how about a hot mexican chicken wrap smothered in melting cheddar cheese with a dollop of sour cream? hmmm. or maybe a freshly made hot breakfast roll with sizzling sausages, crispy bacon and scrambled egg or a hot toasted panini with honey roasted ham with french brie topped off with tangy cranberry sauce or maybe you fancy some tasty bacon, swiss cheese, creamy avocado with lashings of basil mayonnaise or an italian ciabatta accompanied by a steaming hot cappuccino or a fruit smoothie or a nicely chilled juice and to really spoilt yourself a freshly baked blueberry muffin or pastry?

The Sandwich Market combines a wide range of fresh breads and delicious fillings in one tempting menu.

For delivery and pick up phone or fax before 11am on 671 9633