

STI screening project amongst winners at National Health Literacy Awards

Healthcare professionals nationwide acknowledged for improving patient communication

Dublin, Monday, 14th May 2012: The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) Student Health Centre was amongst the winners at today's **Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards** for their project, 'No Umbrella Campaign.'

At a ceremony in Dublin, the DIT Student Health Centre team was awarded for their project, which they developed after noticing that many young men were not attending testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as they feared a painful and invasive test called an 'Umbrella Test.' DIT won first place in the category, 'Best Project in General Practice' for developing a simple but effective campaign to reassure the students that this test was no longer necessary and that STI testing is simple and easier than ever before. They did this by using a colourful, humorous and clearly designed poster that dispels the 'umbrella' myth and removes any fear associated with testing.

Four other organisations were also recognised for their efforts to communicate health information more clearly to the public. These organisations are the National Cancer Control Programme, Arthritis Ireland, the National Cancer Screening Service and RTE Radio 1.

"The DIT Student Health Centre's project showed a clear understanding of the false impressions that young men have about STI screening. They used humour and clear visuals to communicate their message in this innovative and easy-to-replicate campaign," said Dr Gerardine Doyle, UCD School of Business and chairperson of the Crystal Clear Awards judging panel. "As a result of the 'No Umbrella Campaign,' there was an increase of 73% in the number of students attending the centre's STI clinic from the target audience."

Speaking about her team's win, Louise O'Donnell, Practice Nurse, DIT Student Health Centre, said, "We are delighted to have won a Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy award. It is an honour to be recognised for our work. When we saw that uptake amongst our target group was low, we knew that we had to communicate in a way that would resonate with them. This has proven to be highly effective as it has not only promoted

sexual health amongst our total student population, but it has also resulted in an improvement in their overall health and well-being.”

The five winning initiatives were selected from nearly 150 entries which had to demonstrate how they addressed the issue of health literacy. Health literacy is a person’s ability to understand and use basic health information, whether they receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. Health literacy also involves a person having the knowledge to understand their options and make informed decisions about their own health.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Ms Ciara O’Rourke, judge and External Affairs Director, MSD, said, “Four out of ten people in Ireland have trouble with health literacy and can have difficulty understanding health information.¹ That is why it is so heartening to see so many initiatives that are helping patients to have a better understanding of their health. All the winners and finalists that have been recognised today have empowered patients to take a more active role in the management of their own lifestyle, condition or illness and so make more informed decisions about their own health.”

Commenting on the awards, Inez Bailey, Director of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), said, “The initiatives that have been recognised here today show what can be accomplished when clear communication is used in healthcare. Many of the projects could be easily replicated by GP clinics, hospitals and patient groups around the country. NALA offers free advice on how the healthcare community can better communicate with patients so please contact us if you would like help at www.nala.ie.”

The other Crystal Clear award winners were:

- **National Cancer Screening Programme for their Rapid Access Lung Clinic Booklet** which provides information to patients about what to expect before they attend their clinic. The typical lung cancer patient is often from lower socio-economic groups and may have literacy difficulties. To cater for this, the booklet was written in plain English and includes pictures and diagrams to make it easier to understand. It is used in the eight designated cancer centres around the country.
- **Arthritis Ireland for ‘My Health Organiser,’** which gives arthritis patients somewhere to store all their health records including diagnoses, medications and treatments, literally putting the knowledge and information in their hands. The organiser encourages people with arthritis to take control and play an active part in their treatment.
- **National Cancer Screening Service for their bespoke cancer screening training for community health workers in the Traveller Community.** The NCSS developed a bespoke, interactive training programme for Traveller community health workers which support women with low literacy levels to understand complex messages about cancer and screening. The programme incorporates pictorial-led materials that support women with low literacy levels to understand often complex messages about the topic.
- **Conor McGinnity, Nicoline Greer and Liam O’Brien, RTE Radio 1, for their documentary ‘My Dad’s Depression.’** The documentary told Conor McGinnity’s

personal story on how his father's depression has affected the whole family. The aim of the documentary was to give an insight into families who live with depression, but are not sufferers themselves. To that end they did not include any 'expert' opinion – rather they heard directly from the family at the centre of this issue.

The judging panel for the awards is represented by individuals from NALA, MSD, the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Irish Practice Nurses Association (IPNA), UCD, a General Practice, PracticeManager.ie, Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork.

The Crystal Clear Awards are sponsored by MSD and supported by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). Further information on health literacy and the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards can be found at www.healthliteracy.ie.

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Notes to Editor

References

1. EU Health Literacy Survey - Irish Results Notable Findings Report 2011

Definition of health literacy

Health literacy involves a person being able to understand basic health information whether they receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. It also involves a person having the knowledge to understand their options and make informed decisions about their own health.

People working in the healthcare sector play an important part in improving health literacy by communicating more clearly and making information and services more accessible to patients.

MSD in Ireland

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National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

The National Adult Literacy Agency is an independent membership organisation, concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and responses to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland. According to the last international survey, one in four Irish adults has difficulties reading and writing. For example, they may not be able to understand health information or fill out forms.

With this in mind, a lot of NALA's work involves developing policies and practices that reduce literacy-related barriers to accessing information – specifically in public services and the health sector. This has involved working with a number of government departments in training staff in literacy awareness and producing publications in plain English. As its focus is on everyday language, plain English is a style of presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it.