



Donal Cashman in Brussels

BLUE SEPTEMBER

Recently a campaign called Blue September and highlight the importance of men being cancer-aware. Each year, 2,720 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer and there are 543 deaths. The key message for men is to be more proactive in protecting yourself against preventable and treatable diseases. Professor Frank Sullivan of UCHG says that men cannot afford to be embarrassed when it comes to issues in relation to their health.

"They need to discuss any concerns they have with their GP and loved ones."

In general, men are less likely to seek advice from a qualified health professional, he adds, and by and large have a more pessimistic view of their chances in relation to treatment.

Blue September Ireland is aimed at raising awareness of bowel, lung, prostate and testicular cancer while also fundraising for cancer charities. It was first launched in New Zealand in 2008 and has now extended to Australia, America, Britain and Ireland.

The aim is to challenge Irish men to:

- take note of the cancers most likely to affect them;
- to become increasingly aware of their health;
- and to be more open to discussing health concerns with family and friends.

INFORMING FAMILIES OF THEIR CHILD'S DISABILITY

Difficult news is never easy to give or receive but having a blueprint can help. Guidelines for breaking the difficult news to parents that their child has been born with a disability were developed in 2007 by the National Federation of Voluntary Bodies. Testing these guidelines out was important, however, and this has now been done in Cork.

Cork Implementation Project members have now published a report called Informing Families Of Their Child's Disability: *Translating Research Into Practice*.

Parent chairperson Katherine O'Leary's dream is that this blueprint will be adapted to encompass the delivery of all difficult medical news. The research looked at parent needs and how and why hospital staff's communication skills should be improved. Here are some of the telling comments included in the report:

Consultant paediatrician: "I don't actually remember getting a minute of training. I suspect the curriculum nowadays does cater for it."

Parent: "It's not just a sentence, every word in your mind because you are hearing on to everything they say. It sticks in your mind. The doctors need to really plan their sentences and their words because this is going to stay with you for the rest of your life."

For more information or to download the report see www.fedvol.ie and www.informingfamilies.ie

BOOK FOR GRANDPARENTS

More than 50% of grandparents in the EU now provide hands-on childcare support to their grandchildren. Grandparents: *Enjoying And Caring For Your Grandchild* by Dr Miriam Stoppard is a childcare bible for today's new grandparents, publishers say.

A hands-on granny herself and author of 80 books, Dr Stoppard believes that many aspects of childcare have changed and that grandparents need up-to-date information in order to feel confident about helping out with caring for their grandchildren. The book, published by Penguin, retails at €20.99.



FIONA HOBAN

www.fionahoban.ie

Laughter is the best medicine

We often take life, and ourselves, very seriously. The work I do as a counsellor means that having a sense of humour is a must. I would say that it's a very effective therapeutic tool, because once you see the humour in a situation it's impossible to relate to that situation in the same way. Granted, not all situations are to be laughed at, but not taking ourselves so seriously often helps us to lighten up, put things in perspective and see the funny side of life (and ourselves).

Laughter is a universal language that we all understand. It is not something we learn to do. It is an instinctive behaviour: infants begin smiling within weeks of being born and start to laugh at about four months of age – long before they're able to speak.

Laughter is a natural part of everyday life yet we often forget how strange it is, and how little we know about it. There isn't much research on how and why we laugh. We can split the atom and send a man to the moon, yet neuroscientists still have little idea what's happening in our brain when we laugh.

Because laughter is instinctive, it may explain why it's difficult to control consciously (think back to the last time you got a fit of the giggles). Some would say that efforts to either start or to stop laughing on command are often forced or totally futile.

Laughter Yoga therapists, however, would dispute this. They use a blend of stimulated laughter exercises and child-like playfulness to produce laughter in order to enjoy the many health benefits that laughing brings. The most obvious effect of laughter is on our mood.

“

Laughter is a natural part of everyday life yet we often forget how strange it is, and how little we know about it.

”

Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. But it's not just our mood that benefits. A good, hearty laugh leaves your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes and one minute of laughter equals 10 minutes on a rowing machine! Other benefits include relief from physical pain as well as an improved immune system.

But it doesn't stop there. Laughter is also a social phenomenon; laughing with one another creates a positive bond that increases our sense of belonging and social cohesion. This counteracts feelings of alienation – a major factor in depression and suicide – and acts as a strong buffer against stress, disagreements and disappointment. Essentially, we're social creatures; we need to belong and laughter plays no small part in that.

Having a sense of humour and reminding ourselves to lighten up is key to our wellbeing. Someone once said that it's not that we stop laughing when we grow older, it's that we grow older when we stop laughing. **CL**



GET IN TOUCH

Fiona Hoban works as a counsellor in Westport, Co Mayo and also lectures with the National Counselling and Psychotherapy Institute of Ireland (NCPII). She delivers well-being and motivational talks at various conferences and workshops throughout Ireland. For more details go to www.fionahoban.ie If you would like to get Fiona's advice or insight on a particular subject please email info@fionahoban.ie or write to Fiona Hoban, Irish Country Living, Irish Farm Centre, Bluebell, Dublin 12.

