

## Cork medics put forward vision of future



**VITAL PLANS:** Yvonne Davidson, business manager for the oncology division at Cork University Hospital.

Picture: Eddie O'Hare

# New hope in cancer fight

**A** TOP doctor's vision for a multi-million euro cancer clinic in Cork has taken a step closer to reality.

Cancer experts from Cork University Hospital (CUH), Mercy Hospital, the South Infirmary and Tralee General Hospital have been invited to pool their knowledge to put forward a statement of need for a multi-million comprehensive cancer centre to the Health Services Executive (HSE).

It is hoped the development will include palliative and day unit services for cancer patients in the HSE Southern Area.

It is also hoped that, by the end of this year, the HSE Southern Area — which has a population of 500,000 — will have three full-time permanent medical consultant oncologists instead of the current two, one of whom is a locum.



**OLGA CRONIN**

Ms Yvonne Davidson, business manager for the oncology division within CUH, said: "All the hospitals are putting together a statement of need for a comprehensive cancer centre. Once we have this on paper we will be sending it to the HSE seeking approval," she added.

Last December, Cork's only full-time consultant medical oncologist, Dr Seamus O'Reilly, based in CUH, said he wanted to develop an off-hospital cancer centre. He made this clear in a stinging open letter to Minister for Health, Mary Harney, denouncing the state of cancer services in Cork.

His damning words followed the controversial resignation of his

colleague, the only other consultant medical oncologist in Cork, Dr Oscar Breathnach — which happened a year ago tomorrow.

The main reason cited for his departure at that time was his frustration over his failed four-year campaign for a dedicated oncology ward.

While a locum has been working with Dr O'Reilly since Dr Breathnach's departure, a year later his post has still not been filled by a full-time oncologist. Ms Davidson said this was because they had not found a suitable candidate.

She said that they hope to have a full-time oncologist by the end of the year as well as a third oncologist.

"We hope to have three medical consultant oncologists in Cork by the end of the year," she said, adding that they purposefully held off advertising for the post until recently because more fully-qualified oncologists will come on stream this summer.

Although a 10-bed dedicated oncology unit, opened in CUH in January, has eased the pressure, Ms Davidson said a long-term plan for a comprehensive cancer clinic in Cork is vital.

"At the moment, between the hospitals, we cater for 500,000 people for chemotherapy services, and for radiotherapy we cater for one million," she said.

Ms Davidson also said the centre will be vital because while construction is set to begin on a €47m oncology unit in CUH in the next couple of months, this unit will be dedicated to cardiac and renal facilities.

She also said that since a proposed national cancer research strategy is in the hands of Minister Mary Harney, Cork's cancer facilities will need to be upgraded to implement the strategy's goals.

Ms Davidson said that cancer services in Cork had improved significantly since the dedicated 10-bed oncology ward opened in January.

"The unit is actually next to an 11-bed radiotherapy unit, so we sometimes place oncology patients in the radiotherapy unit. So we really have a functioning 21-bed unit, but, ultimately, we need a 30-bed unit" she said.

Meanwhile, spokeswoman for the Cork branch of the Irish Nurses Organisation, Patsy Doyle, said nurses are still 'under extreme pressure'. She also criticised the fact that cancer patients are 'dotted' across different wards in CUH.



**ROBERT O'SHEA**

IT'S been some cold snap we've been having. I'm especially happy that I haven't been in the country with you experiencing it. But somebody had to cover the Academy Awards for the newspaper and that somebody had to be me.

After my in-depth coverage of the Irish film awards last year the bosses decided to splash out on a trip to Hollywood and so I became the first *Echo* reporter to cover the Oscars.

The show itself was a rather dull and predictable affair with the big surprise of the night (spoiler alert for those who wish to watch the highlights tonight on RTÉ Two) being that *Crash* beat *Brokeback Mountain* to the Best Flick award. The latter had been hailed as a breakthrough because it was the first gay cowboy movie but as Morgan Freeman said to me last night, this fails to take into account *Young Buns*, *Rear Bravo* or *The Good, The Bad And The Oh Be Nice*.

Philip Seymour Hoffman won a Best Actor gong for *Capote* (*Capot-eh*) edging out Joaquin (pronounced Whack-eeen) Phoenix but this was measured somewhat with disappointment as his wife Felicity lost out to Reese Witherspoon (pronounced With-a-spoon) in the actress stakes.

Ang Lee finally got the gong that he deserved for *Hulk*, while another director to be honoured, with a second lifetime achievement award, was Robert Altman, the man behind *Short Circuit* and TV shows *M\*A\*S\*H* and *Countdown*.

Other than that there were few original moments from the Kodak Theatre. The show was sprinkled with the usual; celebrities reading lame jokes from auto-cue while trying not to speak over each other; tranquilliser darts flying towards documentary award winners as they tried to thank every single human being since the start of time; and one camera trained on Jack Nicholson to get his reaction to everything, because he is the barometer.

The post-Awards parties are almost as important as the ceremony because here you can drink cocktails until your eyeballs hurt.

It was at these parties that I found myself rubbing elbows with some of Hollywood's finest. For this I have to thank our very own Cillian Rhys-Meyers, who chaperoned me from soiree to soiree.

**ROBERT O'SHEA pretends he is our man in Hollywood for the Oscars bash**

Everywhere you looked last night your gaze was interrupted by another glitzy star. One minute you are trying to look down Scarlett Johansson's dress, the next you are talking to Marlon Brando. Up close though you realise that these people are just human beings after all, albeit incredibly good-looking human beings.

Our very own Rhys Meyers is one of these good-looking people and I thought it couldn't do too much harm to ask him how come he was so popular with the ladies.

"Colin," I asked him, "how do you pull it off?"

But he was already deep in conversation with two wannabe starlets and impressing them with a piece of the red carpet he had cut off earlier.

Actually, for hours there it didn't look like I was going to score at all, until one of Hollywood's most famous actresses sidled over to me with a flute of champers. I'm not one to kiss-and-tell and anyway you'll read all about it in the trade papers over the next few days, but I will give you one hint in that she was married to Humphrey Bogart at one stage.

I will leave you with this joke doing the rounds. Mosey on over to someone who is waiting to see the Oscar highlights and say: "Hear what happened at the Oscars last night?" They will beg you not to tell them. You say, "No, did you hear about the actress who was stabbed." Their interest will be piqued.

Then say, "Your one ... Reese... Reese..." and they will interject, "Witherspoon?" and you say back, "No, With a knife."

See you all at Cannes. ● The *Evening Echo* would like to distance itself from views stated in this article. We categorically deny sending Mr O'Shea to Tinseltown.

Nor do we think he even saw the Oscars because we imagine he cannot afford Sky TV. Our best guess is he got the results on Aertel.

He will not be going to Cannes.