

FIONNUALA COOK - Opening Speech
HCA LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT FORUM
THURSDAY, 6 APRIL 2017

Once again it is my pleasure to exercise my role as President and declare this Forum open. It is particularly appropriate today because here we are in Belfast in the famous Europa Hotel a new setting for delegates, but a familiar venue for us locals.

However, this Forum will be my last as President so I feel somewhat sad. But I don't want any of you to be sad. Speaking on behalf of the Association I want you all to have a great time in this City.

For some of you the good times have already begun with the reception in the City Hall last night. It is a privilege to have the Lord Mayor with us today and we thank him for his words of welcome and encouragement. For those of you who missed it last night here is the portrait of my husband as Lord Mayor nearly 30 years ago. I am sure you will agree that living with me for over 40 years has kept him youthful and cheerful.

Today we welcome all those who have not attended one of our Fora, or Conferences as they were once called. Each has been a rich opportunity to learn new skills and practices and to hear the leaders of Hospital Catering and other allied professions point the way ahead. The standard of hospital catering in Northern Ireland is already very high, but we hope that all our delegates will learn something new which will raise those standards even higher.

It has not been a good year for the NHS and our hospitals. We have seen a constant picture painted of chaos and confusion. We are told that costs are spiralling and money available falling. Yet at the same time each of us can tell how patients find care, compassion and good catering when they are taken into hospital. The picture needs to be brighter to reflect the good things that are being done. It needs to reflect how those who work inside the NHS are putting their best foot forward and continually trying to improve.

That desire to improve is strong here today. Those who can help us are here today in the shape of our suppliers who have loaded up their wagons and crossed the sea so we all can appreciate the excellence of their products, machines, devices, programmes and learn how these things can be installed in our hospitals and clinics to serve patients, staff and visitors.

There's dedicated time within the Programme for viewing the Exhibition, but I urge you to also take time between sessions to visit as many stands as you can to see the enormous range which has been assembled today. Talk to our suppliers. They are the experts we need to listen to.

We are living in interesting times with Brexit, a potential Scottish referendum and our own local situation, so the future structures do not have much clarity despite reports and plans. Yet that lack of clarity is not dominant in our work as hospital caterers. When you come into work each day you bring with you the goals of every hospital caterer which are well-fed patients getting the right food in the right place and at the right time to make them healthy again.

We are glad to welcome you all to the Emerald Isle and we hope you will increase your knowledge, improve your standards and extend your friendships. We have people here today from all the countries of these islands and each and every one of them is welcome.

As our theme says, 'Seize the moment to Deliver the future'. ~There are great days ahead. We are the skilled and capable people to make that future work for us. We welcome you with the words of Maurice Craig:

Red brick in the suburbs

White horse on the wall

Eyetalian Marbles in the City Hall

O stranger from England, why stand so aghast

May the Lord in his mercy

Be kind to Belfast

I now declare the Forum open, trusting that everyone will enjoy two great days and two entertaining nights.