

EMBARGO TO TIME OF DELIVERY – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT MICHAEL D HIGGINS AT THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE FOUNDATION OF PEAMOUNT HOSPITAL

THURSDAY, 21ST JUNE, 2012

Tá an-áthas orm bheith in bhur measc inniu ar an ócáid stairiúil seo. Míle buíochas díobh as an bhfáilte sin.

Ladies and Gentlemen I am delighted to be here this morning to celebrate Peamount's Centenary Year Programme. I would like to thank Robin Mullan for his kind invitation to join you, and of course all of you for that very warm welcome.

Tá céad bliain ann ó bhog 24 othar go Ospidéal Peamount den chéad uair sa bhliain 1912. Ní raibh aon seirbhís sláinte in Éireann san am sin. I ngeall ar an fíor-bhochtanais na tíre bhí tithe plódaithe mar aon le míchothú ann. Níorbh aon ionadh, mar sin, go bhfuair na mílte bás i ngeall ar ghalair sláinte éagsúla. Níl aon dabht ann ach gur chuir na coinníollacha seo go mór le scaipeadh na heitinne (TB) fosta. Is é fírinne an scéil na go rabhamar i gcroílár eipidéime 's ní raibh an t-infreastruchtúr againn chun dul i ngleic leis an ngalar tubaisteach seo agus, dá bhrí sin, d'imigh na sluaite ar shlí na fírinne.

[Today we mark the one hundredth anniversary of that day in 1912 when the first twenty four patients moved into Peamount Hospital. Ireland was, at that time, a country with no health service and a deep and desperate poverty with overcrowded housing, malnutrition and the rapid spread of disease causing numerous deaths. We also had, therefore the conditions that bred tuberculosis. In fact we were in the grip of an epidemic, with little infrastructure to fight the spread of this dreadful disease which claimed so many lives.]

In my inaugural address as President of Ireland I said that every age must have its Aisling and dream of a better, kinder, happier, shared world. Peamount Hospital was born out of such an Aisling; out of the dream of Lady Aberdeen to fight the appalling ravages of TB, a disease which had claimed the life of her own son. Therefore, we can say that Peamount was born out of an Aisling that had a sadness and a compassion at its very heart. But it was also built, block by block, through determination, persistence, and a refusal to give in to opposition. In fact, so great was local resistance and hostility to the building of this sanatorium that on the eve of its opening, men from nearby towns and villages demolished one of the pavilions.

Dá mbeadh Lady Aberdeen linn go fóill d'fhéachadh muid uirthi mar dhuine atá tugtha don cheartas sóisialta. Ach is é a mhalairt a bhí fíor ag tús an fhichiú haois. Ní

gan dua a bhain sí amach a brionglóid féin san am sin. Féachadh uirthi mar greannaitheoir a chuir isteach ar dhaoine cumhachtacha na haoise sin.

[In today's terms, Lady Aberdeen can be seen as a social justice advocate. However, in the early twentieth century, as she strove so hard to achieve her dream, she was regarded as a nuisance and an irritant who was trespassing on the territory of the bureaucrats.]

And yet, a century later and thanks to the persistence and often sheer stubbornness of Lady Aberdeen and her supporters, we stand here today in a fully functioning Peamount Hospital, one that is as relevant today as it was back in 1912 when it was established to fight and control the spread of TB. Now, in 2012, Peamount is an organisation which has continuously evolved as a service provider with the ability to meet the changing needs of Irish society and the surrounding community over the past one hundred years.

Today, amongst the comprehensive range of services provided by Peamount, is the continuing care for individuals with a neurological or intellectual disability. When I was inaugurated as President of Ireland I stated that we must seek to build together an active, inclusive citizenship; based on participation, equality, and respect for all. There can be no doubt that Peamount Hospital, throughout the years, has played a pivotal role in making a very real and significant contribution to supporting and enabling people with a disability to realise their full potential, and to participate in, and contribute to their communities.

There was a time when Ireland depended largely on a programme of incarceration and segregation to respond to disability issues. In fact, in many, many cases those with an intellectual disability were pushed to the margins of society, often denied their basic human rights, and expected to live lives devoid of the opportunity to reach their potential, to find their voice, to make a difference within their communities.

Today we are, thankfully, a more enlightened people. A people who realise that fellow citizens with a disability have the same needs and rights as citizens as the rest of society; that they want to find a positive response in their communities, to have as healthy a life as possible, to have meaningful social interaction, the chance to learn and the opportunity to contribute through employment. Much of this positive change in society's perceptions of those with disabilities has come about due to the persistent efforts of organisations like Peamount who work tirelessly to support people with a disability and to help them realise their full potential and to participate in, and contribute to, their communities.

Of course, like all the best organisations, Peamount is not content to stand still, to tread water and to congratulate itself on what it has achieved. Over the years you have continued to look around you, to develop, to grow, to expand and to constantly rise to the new challenges of an ever changing and evolving society. Today, the comprehensive range of services you provide include continuing care, rehabilitation and a community diagnostic facility.

And you continue to challenge yourselves. I am encouraged to hear that you are now working on a plan for the redevelopment of this hospital; examining ways in which

you can diversify and deliver a range of services in the future, not in isolation, but in support of acute hospital services in the region. I commend you for this vision and it is yet another example of how this valuable organisation continues to evolve, to remain relevant, and to respond to the changing needs of our society and its citizens.

Peamount stands today as a proud testament to the spirit, compassion and great dedication of Lady Aberdeen and I have no doubt that she would be extremely proud of what has been achieved here over the past one hundred years. But it is also a testament to the many, many people who have worked so hard over the years, running, staffing, raising funds for and otherwise supporting Peamount. It is because of all of you that Lady Aberdeen's Aisling lives on and that Peamount continues to offer patients a place where they can be cared for and nurtured in safety, and respect.

In these times of economic retrenchment, Peamount's work takes on a new pressure, intensity and importance. Unemployment affects people with disabilities disproportionately, scarcer resources will impact on services and on fund-raising. However the history of this organisation demonstrates that you have the inspiration, the imagination and the commitment to make a strong contribution in the coming years to better the lot of the disabled in our society.

I would like to conclude by congratulating everyone who has been and continues to be, involved in the development and provision of care here at Peamount. You should be very proud of all you have achieved and of the considerable and positive contribution you continue to make to the lives of your patients and their families.

I wish you all continued success in working to meet the needs of the patients in your care and a very enjoyable centenary celebration.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.