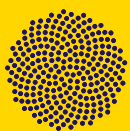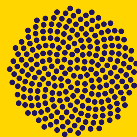# Ireland
# Where Digital Health Thrives
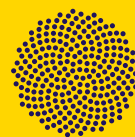
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# Digital health empowering people

**Derick Mitchell, CEO, and Ava Battles, Chairperson of the Irish Platform for Patient Organisations, Science and Industry, on why digital health is about much more than technology.**

"Digital health traditionally tends to be looked at from the point of view of information technology (IT)," says Derick Mitchell. "In fact, digital health is far more than IT; it's about people and the voice of the patient.

"It's about identifying new ways of solving the problems that exist in our healthcare, creating better experiences for both patients and the HCP (Health Care Professional)."

The Irish Platform for Patient Organisations, Science and Industry (IPPOSI) brings together patient groups, scientists, clinicians, industry and other key decision-makers, to discuss issues relevant to those involved in delivering treatments. IPPOSI plays a pivotal role in bridging the gap between patients, science and industry and the decision-makers.

And Derick says one such way to create better experiences for patients and efficiencies for healthcare organisations, is by transforming patient records from a paper-based system to an electronic-based system. "We need to implement a National Electronic Health Record sooner rather than later.

"Currently, it's not easy for patients to access their records, but if patients were to have access to an electronic record of their medical information, it would improve their engagement and also patient-HCP relationships."

Derick says patients may feel more empowered to use the data and recognise the value of it, taking a more active role in their own care, "The patient can also play a part in how that data can be used appropriately to make more informed decisions and improve the health system as a whole."

## Lack of connectivity

However, Derick says there is currently a lack of connectivity between data collection systems in healthcare facilities. "The ways that healthcare data is stored, shared, standardised, and regulated vary across communities, agencies, health systems, and providers."

This can lead to issues interpreting shared data and matching patient records across systems.

"There are certain building blocks involving the integration of information that need to be in place. One such building block would be that whoever is collecting data would have the knowledge and training to allow them to input the data in a way that reaches a certain minimum standard across healthcare."

Ava Battles says that very often, the best solutions don't come from just the IT experts. "The best solutions come from the people who are the frontline workers. Those who have direct experience of where there are gaps or deficiencies in the current health service."

IPPOSI has been involved with a number of new courses including a UL-HSE-led MSc in Digital Health Transformation, which Derick says has been a positive experience,

"Not only for the 50+ healthcare professionals on the course, but also from the patient perspective. This is because we have introduced a patient 'Dragons Den' into the programme, as we feel HCPs have great ideas about how problems can be solved through digital health.

Ava says its about making sure that those ideas produce benefits for the patients. "So, a lot of these digital solutions would benefit from the input of patients at the earliest possible stage."

IPPOSI also runs a successful patient education programme in health innovation and is seeking to add new modules on 'patient data' to the programme curriculum.

## Maximising data

According to Derick, the more people that are aware of the value of quality health data, the more rapid improvement and digitisation of the service there will be.

"You can have the best IT system in the world, but if you don't have the people to use it in a way that maximises the data, then you really won't reap all the potential benefits from it."

Derick says in order for Ireland to be a leader in digital health, we need to engage with the multinational health companies based here. "Not just to see where digital health would improve their processes and products, but also to engage the staff in those companies. So that they know the value of having better quality health information and recognise the current difficulties in the Irish health system.

"As a result, staff will be conscious of the opportunities within the company to do something that's relevant to Ireland and for Irish patients. With that kind of a motivation factor, innovation can come from the most ordinary of backgrounds."

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