

# WIN



Journal of the  
Irish Nurses and  
Midwives Organisation

Special report  
from the 2021  
ADC  
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## World of Irish Nursing & Midwifery

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# International days

INMO members celebrate nursing and midwifery

# Look after yourself first

Calodagh McCumiskey told the ADC that in order to maintain high levels of patient care, nurses and midwives must remember not to neglect their own wellbeing. Max Ryan reports

CALODAGH McCumiskey channelled her inner Charles Darwin when addressing the INMO annual delegate conference (ADC) by reminding delegates that it's not the strongest among us who survive, but those of us who are the most adaptable to change.

"The key factors in being resilient are the concepts of adaptability and being responsive," said Ms McCumiskey, who is a wellbeing specialist and chief executive of Spiritual Earth. "The nursing and midwifery professions demonstrate both in abundance," she added.

Nurses and midwives have shown a "warrior-like spirit" throughout the pandemic, according to Ms McCumiskey, who believes that self-care is just as important as patient care. She said that to sustain the high levels of service that nurses and midwives have been providing over the past year and beyond, they must remember to put their own wellbeing first.

"I'm always reminded of what they say on the aeroplane about putting on your own oxygen mask first. People who work in social professions like all of you have a tendency to want to look after others first, but if you're not looking after yourself, that will have an impact in the long term on your ability to care for others."

The added emotional burden that healthcare workers have had to shoulder on behalf of their patients and families has seen the mental health effects of Covid-19 on nurses and midwives rival the consequences of the pandemic itself, according to Ms McCumiskey. When difficult situations arise, she said we have three choices: to be bitter, better or broken.

"What bitter means is that we say 'that's not fair' or 'why me?'. We can go down the road of feeling broken and thinking 'this is too much' or 'I won't get through this' or we can choose to be better, and better happens when we choose to learn from situations," she told delegates.

## 'Convert stress into growth'

Ms McCumiskey said that stress will always be present but that it is vital for



nurses and midwives to learn to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy stress.

Healthy stress, Ms McCumiskey said, is stress that helps us to grow. Sometimes we choose to take it on, eg. having children or getting a mortgage, and other times it chooses us, eg. Covid-19.

"Covid-19 was a stress that you didn't choose, but those of you who are growing from it are converting that into a positive stress. You're now better equipped to handle life and the realities of today because of it."

Unhealthy stress is self inflicted and toxic, according to Ms McCumiskey.

"It's a stress that we generate through our own actions, habits or thoughts. If I'm thinking negatively a lot, that will generate stress. If I'm not drinking enough water or I'm drinking too much alcohol or coffee or not eating or sleeping well, that will also generate negative stress.

"The third type of stress is also an unhealthy stress that I get through watching too much negative news or listening to gossip or to stories or conversations that stress me out more than I need to.

## 'Close the files in your head'

The mind's capacity to handle stress is limited, so by clearing our head of unhealthy stress we can make room for healthy stress, allowing ourselves to grow, according to Ms McCumiskey, who likened this process to closing files on your

computer to enhance its performance.

"If you had a document open on a computer with 20 other files open on it, would you be able to do your work effectively? The answer is no, but that's what happens in most of our minds; we have yesterday's problems, last week's problems and last month's problems open.

"So this simple process of closing the files in your head is very powerful and can enable you to bring a clear, fresh perspective to your work."

## 'Burnout erodes your potential'

Taking time out to rest is another key to a strong and healthy mind, according to Ms McCumiskey, who said that just as rest is crucial to building muscle at the gym or training for a marathon, taking breaks is vitally important for the mind.

"If we don't take breaks, what happens is the muscles don't actually get the chance to grow back stronger. Equally, the same thing applies to the mind – it's when we take breaks that we learn from situations and the mind becomes stronger.

"If we don't take breaks, what happens is we get burnt out. So many people in modern life are operating on some level of burnout, and what burnout does is it erodes your potential. So if you want to be able to provide care consistently, it's imperative that you take good care and get enough rest for yourself."

See <https://spiritualearth.com>