

About the Innovator

Aoife Collins is a senior physiotherapist working in South Lee Primary Care, Cork. She has 17 years' experience working as a physiotherapist. Aoife holds a BSc in Physiotherapy and an MSc in Older Person Rehabilitation. She has specialist training in Back Pain management and treatment stratification and is the Local Champion for Telehealth Implementation for Physiotherapy, Cork South Lee. Aoife was the winner of the Individual category HSE-HIHI Spark Ignite National Final 2021.



About Health Innovation Hub Ireland

Health services in Ireland and across the world are increasingly seeking innovations in health-related technology, products and services to drive improvements in the quality, access and value of healthcare delivery. Health Innovation Hub Ireland (HIHI) brings enterprises and healthcare professionals together to test, validate and help commercialise innovative technologies, products and services, while enabling greater innovation in healthcare delivery. HIHI supports the building of an innovation culture within the health service through a suite of knowledge building resources and guidance for healthcare professionals on the key steps from ideation to

adoption. HIHI works with those with ideas that address unmet healthcare needs to develop new products and processes within the healthcare system and stimulate a pipeline of new needs driven innovations for the future.



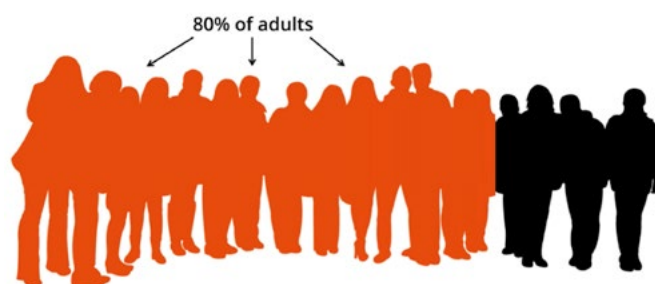
The Healthcare Challenge

Back pain is the most commonly reported health condition in Ireland, 80% of Irish adults experience back pain at some point in their life. Back pain is estimated to cost the country more than cancer and diabetes treatments combined. The economic burden of low back pain is estimated to be around £2.8 billion in the UK per year. Previous research found that disability payments for back pain amounted to €348 million per year, and 27% of people who receive income support do so due to low back pain (LBP), making it the highest single reason for people claiming income support.

People with persistent back pain are often referred to an orthopaedic specialist, this wait can be up to four

years and even when seen, less than 10% require surgery, with the remaining 90% discharged back in to primary care, delaying their engagement with physiotherapy.

Various approaches to diagnose, treat and manage LBP have arisen, leading to an exponential increase in health care costs. Attempts in recent decades to treat back pain by treating the spine itself through injections or surgery have had only marginal success. Paradoxically, this trend has been associated with a concurrent increase in disability and chronicity. Therefore, the HSE faces enormous challenges, with both the escalating disability burden and financial impact of LBP.



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The solution

Aoife's innovation is the Rapid-Access Online Back Care (ABC) Programme. Aoife plans to deliver her award winning, evidence-based group programme via an integrated software platform delivered by Salaso Health Solutions. Moving from a traditional-care model to an innovative digital-care model, this easy-to-use, GDPR-compliant software will provide a patient portal and smartphone application, linked with a platform for the physiotherapist who will devise and manage the programme.

By using an online format, clients who struggle to attend a clinic can access their physiotherapist without the exertion or expense of leaving home. Clients will be able to repeat the programme themselves at any time, thus encouraging self-empowerment, and avoid ineffective and costly passive treatments. The adoption of a digital programme will increase access opportunities for all patients, particularly those living in remote areas.



Above: Aoife Collins with HIHI Interim director Dr Tanya Mulcahy.

HSE-HIHI Spark Ignite

The Health Innovation Hub collaborated with the Office of Nursing and Midwifery Service Development (ONMSD), National Doctors Training and Planning (NDTP), the National Health and Social Care Professions Office (HSCP), and the Galway Local Enterprise Office to deliver the only bottom up, staff facing, innovation competition open to all HSE staff. The programme received over 180 applications from all disciplines and grades across the HSE. Thirty-six applications were selected to attend an innovation workshop to develop their idea by building a business proposition and preparing a pitch. The workshop participants pitched their ideas to a panel of experienced judges to win prize funding to develop their idea towards reality.

Outcome Report/ Next Steps

Aoife plans to develop further content for the Rapid-Access Online Back Care (ABC) programme. In addition, Aoife will continue to work with Salaso to broaden the delivery and impact of the programme. Implementation of this programme aims to save up to 20% of physiotherapists' time each week, increase throughput and decrease waiting times. Addressing low back pain in a meaningful, patient friendly, and accessibly way is a key priority for any healthcare system. If addressed, the estimated savings to the exchequer should be €173-€259 million in the next 3-5 years.

Role of HIHI

HIHI aided Aoife in developing a prize-winning presentation displaying the need for a solution in this space from a patient, clinical, and commercial perspective. Aoife's idea won the Individual category in the Cork regional final and the Individual prize at the national final. The HIHI team helped Aoife to identify the financial and clinical benefits, increase efficiencies, and investigate the scalability of the solution to other primary care centres and beyond.



Testimonial

I am delighted to win the prestigious Spark Ignite National Award on behalf of The Physiotherapy Department in Cork South Lee Primary Care. To be short-listed in such a competitive contest has given me the confidence to believe in my innovation and drive it forward. Winning this competition has shown me that innovative healthcare is essential to continuously improve HSE service provision, and that HSE-HIHI Spark Ignite offers the support needed to all front-line staff to develop their ideas from a spark to their fruition.

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