

**TARGETING THERAPIES, STRATIFYING PUBLIC HEALTH:
PUBLIC, PATIENT & ACTIVIST PERSPECTIVES
UCD WORKSHOP
NOVEMBER 3RD 2023**



L – R: Nicole Gross- NCI, Aine Varley – HSE/UCD, Mina Hosseini – UCD, Costanza Galanti – Univ. of Padua, Ilaria Galasso – TUM, Ongolly Fernandos – UCD, Susi Geiger – UCD, Mirza Alas Portillo – UCD, Sone Erikainen – Univ. of Aberdeen, Martyn Pickersgill – Univ. of Edinburgh, James Larkin - RCSI

Summary:

Prof Susi Geiger (University College Dublin), Dr Ilaria Galasso (Technical University of Munich), Dr Sonja Erikainen (University of Aberdeen) and Prof Martyn Pickersgill (University of Edinburgh) designed and organized an international joint event funded by ERC MISFIRES and the AHRC Targeting Therapies Network with Access to Medicine Ireland on “Targeting therapies, stratifying public health: public, patient & activist perspectives”. It was hosted by NovaUCD and took place on Friday 3rd November from 10am – 5.30pm. The event examined the relationship between targeted pharmaceutical innovation, high-tech therapies, and public health from an ethical and distributive justice perspective. It explored the mutual shaping of therapeutic R&D and the organisation of the pharmaceutical market (including the pricing of hi-tech therapies), both historically and with a view to likely future implications for access to care and public health. It illuminated how interactions between policy, markets, and healthcare configure R&D practices, access to therapies, and patient experiences. The event also critically analysed to what extent, and in which ways, these practices could reify pre-existing disadvantages for some, while benefitting others. The Dublin event is part of a series of joint events between Prof Geiger’s ERC MISFIRES grant and Prof Martyn Pickersgill, Usher Institute, University of Edinburgh, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK.

Programme:

10:00 Registration & Coffee

10:30 Welcome address “Pharmaceutical markets and their politics” by Prof Susi Geiger, UCD

11:00 Panel “Inequalities, inclusion and exclusion, and justice in health research and care” with Dr Ilaria Galasso, Dr Sone Erikainen & Dr Costanza Galanti, chaired by Prof Martyn Pickersgill, University of Edinburgh

12:00 Lunch

13:00 “The emergence of the (empty) antimicrobial pipeline 1980-2020” Mirza Alas, UCD

13:45 “Marketing strategies of the pharmaceutical & medical device industry in Ireland” Dr James Larkin, RCSI, University of Medicine & Health Sciences

14:30 Coffee break

15:00 Patient & Access to Medicines Ireland (AMI) panel with Miriam Staunton, Robbie Lawlor & Dr Kieran Harkin, chaired by Prof Susi Geiger, UCD

16:00 Discussion

16:30 Reception

17:30 Close

Morning Session:

Professor Susi Geiger commenced the workshop by delivering a presentation on patents within the pharmaceutical industry. She initiated her talk with a brief introduction to each project within the ERC MISFIRES research programme, which she leads as the principal investigator. Each project in this programme focuses on various aspects of activism within the context of healthcare and pharmaceutical market failures. The highlight of her presentation was the observation that big pharmaceutical companies are shifting their focus away from research and development (R&D), instead allocating more effort towards accumulating patents and acquiring rights to crucial ingredients necessary for essential medicines. This shift places them in a powerful position to determine the pricing of these medicines. While it is argued that the prices are less important than the lives they save, it is also noted that there is a chance that they could be reduced if alternative existing modes of incentivizing the industry's R&D activities were further developed and implemented, including R&D and innovation prizes and innovation funds.



Photo: Prof Susi Geiger, University College Dublin.

Following the previous session, a panel discussion entitled "Inequalities, Inclusion and Exclusion, and Justice in Health Research and Care" was conducted by Dr. Ilaria Galasso, Dr.

Costanza Galanti, and Dr. Sone Erikainen, with Professor Martyn Pickersgill of the University of Edinburgh as the chairperson. Sone, Ilaria and Costanza each briefly presented their research, which ranged from participants-as-leaders to inequalities of healthcare for Transgender people to the conditions of success of healthcare worker activism. This panel held significance as it addressed profound inequalities in access to healthcare, particularly concerning the most vulnerable individuals in society, including those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, as well as other minority groups such as migrants and LGBTQ individuals. Panelists concurred that minorities may be excluded from high-priced therapies and medicines for reasons including social norms or access to healthcare coverage. The presentations in this panel ignited discussions on the manner in which activism and advocacy manifest in different contexts while advocating for broader access to essential medicines. At the end of this panel, workshop participants were prompted to contemplate whether they identify as activists or advocates.



Photo; L-R Dr. Ilaria Galasso, Dr. Sone Erikainen, Dr. Costanza Galanti and Prof Martyn Pickersgill.

Afternoon Session

Mirza Alas Portillo, a PhD student in the UCD School of History, opened the afternoon session with a presentation entitled "The Emergence of the (Empty) Antimicrobial Pipeline 1980-2020", which focused on declining innovation in antibiotic drugs during this timeframe. Her

presentation highlighted the abandonment of R&D around these critical medicines, attributing it to big pharma's prioritization of substantial profits over antibiotic research and development. Despite the importance of these drugs, they are not as financially lucrative as other pharmaceuticals. Consequently, most pharmaceutical companies have essentially ceased their research efforts in this area, leaving the field to small nonprofits creating a potential future shortage of antibiotics.

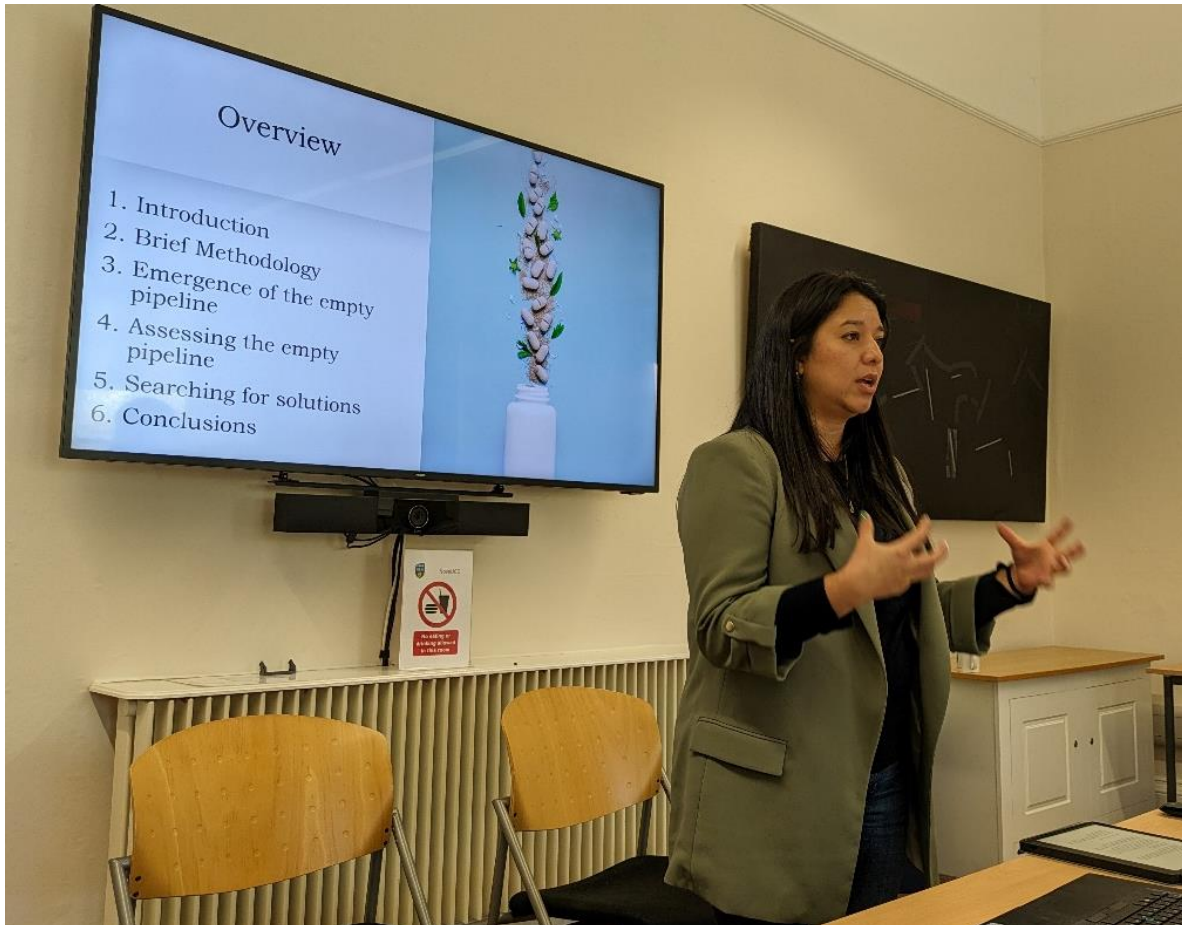


Photo: Ms. Mirza Alas Portillo, UCD School of History.

Following on, Dr. James Larkin, a postdoctoral fellow at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, presented on the marketing strategies of pharmaceutical manufacturers, emphasizing the potential influence they might have on GP practices in persuading them to prescribe their medications through various incentives. GPs receive a range of incentives from pharmaceutical companies, which cover various expenses, including membership registration fees, sponsorships for events/conferences, and continuous medical education, among others. From his presentation, it was noted that although there are efforts to maintain a record of these transactions on different portals, these efforts at transparency of marketing spend are

often incomplete, with significant gaps in reporting. Following his presentation, other workshop participants shared their experiences with pharmaceutical marketing in various contexts based on their experiences as healthcare practitioners and discussed how it could impact the prescription of medicines.



Photo: Dr. James Larkin, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

The workshop concluded with an “advocacy and activist panel” discussion chaired by Professor Susi Geiger, featuring a doctor and two patients, Dr. Kieran Harkin and Robbie Lawlor of Access to Medicines Ireland, along with Miriam Staunton who campaigns for better patient access to cancer trials and treatment. During this panel, Miriam shared her struggle to access oncology treatments, which were exceptionally expensive. Her experience shed light on the exorbitant emotional and often physical costs that patients must bear in a world where pharmaceutical manufacturers have the freedom to set their prices with minimal control. Robbie, who is also an activist and a founding member of AMI and ACTUP Dublin, emphasized the importance of activism in facilitating access to medicines, particularly among minority and marginalized communities. He illustrated the challenges of accessing medicines in other regions, such as Africa and Ukraine, using practical examples involving access to HIV medication and the smallpox vaccine. Further, Dr. Harkin emphasized the role of healthcare providers as activists and advocates in the fight for improved access to essential medicines.



Photo: Panel discussion L-R Prof Susi Geiger, Dr. Kieran Harkin, Ms. Miriam Staunton, and Mr. Robbie Lawlor.

We thank all speakers and participants for a day full of insights, and we hope to continue the interesting discussions at a further ARHC event in Edinburgh in February 2024 or at our final MISFIRES event in May 2024.

