

Rude health

Hello, Mary Lou

There's more than a touch of déjà vu about Sinn Féin's world-class health plans, writes **Maurice Gueret**, as he discusses toast, piles and fictional psychopaths

Cash cow

Better4Health was the plan Sinn Féin fought its recent poll-topping election on. We had no Mary Lou (pictured right) canvassers or party manifestos in the run-up to the vote, so after the count, I went hunting for the detail. Just as Bertie Ahern did two decades before, Sinn Féin speaks of a 'world-class system' of healthcare. It wants it free for all, and funded by more tax. Many citizens would gladly pay bigger chunks of their pay packet in return for a responsive and more equitable health service. Scandinavians come to mind. But their politicians plan, manage and account for the spend. One has only to look at the debacle of our children's hospital overspend to see how our State health system is regarded. A never-ending cash cow, milked for profit, accountable to nobody. Let's wish new parties every success with their power. I suspect there will be at least one further election before we know which Taoiseach snips the ribbons of the new kid on the block at St James's.

Chicken feed

To be fair to Sinn Féin, it does know about the problems in family-doctor land. It promises to train an extra 39 new GPs a year. Chicken feed, but welcome. The number of hospital consultants has doubled in two decades, while the number of full-time GPs has barely moved at all. I also like Sinn Féin's idea of paying a salary to 200 family doctors to attract them into rural areas where there are not enough patients to pay staff, let alone the doctor. It would also pay the salaries of 200 secretaries. The party's manifesto costs

this at €30m, or €150,000 for each doctor/secretary combination. But it doesn't say how it's divided. On the other hand, Sinn Féin promises to recruit 800 more consultants plus medical secretaries at a cost of €290m. That works out at over €360,000 per consultant/secretary combination. Where exactly is the equity in that to attract more doctors, secretaries and nurses to work out in the community?

Nice Chianti

Last week, Dubray on Grafton Street hosted a launch for a new book I was asked to preview before publication. *Psychopath? Why We Are Charmed By The Anti-Hero* is a fascinating study of villains, miscreants and slubberdegullions by Stephen McWilliams, the highly regarded Dublin psychiatrist. There are no real people featured in his book. Dr McWilliams explains how failed US presidential candidate Barry Goldwater once sued when 12,000 psychiatrists were polled about his suitability for the White House in 1964. His lawsuit succeeded, and shrinks the world over now rarely comment on the mental state of public individuals. Yet the psychopaths meticulously dissected out in Stephen's new book are familiar to us all. We have a chapter on the political psychopath, led by Frank Underwood of *House of Cards* notoriety. There is shy Tom, the borderline psychopath who commits murder on a rowing boat in the novel and film *The Talented Mr Ripley*. And we have the bells-and-whistles incarcerated psychopath who boasts about eating human liver with fava beans and a nice



Charles McQuillan

Chianti. *Psychopath?* is that rare book which educated me as much as it entertained. In a room of 200 people, there is probably one psychopath. Not all are murderers. Some carve out successful careers in business, law or medicine — and as estate agents.

Toasty cures

I'm still getting tales of good haemorrhoid salves and great hospital toast being sent to me. Though I don't think the two are related. I'm told the best toast you can get in any Irish hospital is made at the endoscopy unit of Tallaght University Hospital. Much better than any maternity hospital, says a lady who has experienced both. She sets the scene. "You are fasting from the day before, only allowed to drink a barrel of rotten clean-out prep. On the day of the

scope, you may not be called down until 4pm. With sedation, you are left to sleep for an hour, then the nurse sits you up and asks, Will you have tea and toast? This toast is the most delicious, hot, buttery toast you'll ever eat, as you are empty from fasting and drinking prep liquid. You might even be lucky and get offered second helpings." Sounds good. Form an orderly queue. A gentleman wrote to offer his own cupboard gem from the haemorrhoid world. It's a cream called Rowatanal, and he says it's very effective "on the area in question". I'll take his word for it, and we'll talk about how to pronounce it here next week. **L**

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