

**INAUGURAL AWARD IN MEMORY OF
CAPTAIN DARA FITZPATRICK**

To honour the memory of one of Ireland's first female search and rescue pilots, the Irish Paramedicine Education and Research Network (IPERN) has launched the Dara Fitzpatrick Award for inspirational women who work within the pre-hospital care community. The inaugural award will be presented on International Women's Day on 8 March.

When IPERN had initially discussed the creation of an annual award to recognise exceptional women working in emergency medical services (EMS), which would be presented every year on International Women's Day, the decision on who the award should be named after was immediately unanimous.

A panel discussion by IPERN during International Women's Day on 8 March 2022 (which focused on breaking the bias for women who work in EMS) concluded with the special announcement of the new award to honour the memory of Captain Dara Fitzpatrick (1971-2017).

During her trailblazing career she flew over 800 missions with the Irish Coast Guard. Tragically in March 2017 during a rescue mission, Captain Fitzpatrick and her three crew members Captain Mark Duffy and winch operators Ciarán Smith and Paul Ormsby lost their lives off the North Mayo coast.

"When one thinks of inspirational female leaders within Ireland's EMS sector, Dara's name is immediately at the forefront of our thoughts," noted Dr Niamh Cummins, IPERN's Founder and Chair, and Public Health Lecturer at the University of Limerick.

The Dara Fitzpatrick Award aims to pay tribute to her powerful legacy and will be presented annually on International Women's Day (8 March) to an inspirational female colleague working within Ireland's pre-hospital care community.

"Dara was an exceptional female who trailblazed a career for herself and for future females in a predominantly male environment. Dara was incredibly brave in the role she undertook as a Search and Rescue Pilot and Captain.

"She led her team with an ethos of professionalism and equality and a leadership style which encouraged teamwork, care and compassion," noted advanced paramedic Grainne O'Shea, IPERN Committee Member.

EDUCATION AND COLLABORATION
IPERN is an inter-professional team of paramedics, nurses, doctors and scientists dedicated to increasing research capacity for out-of-hospital care in Ireland through engagement, education and collaboration.

Since IPERN was first established in 2021, it has collaborated with colleagues nationally and internationally to establish special interest groups on Human Factors, Mental Health, Medical Logistics, Trauma, Paediatrics and recently on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

EDI ensures fair treatment and opportunity for all. It aims to eradicate prejudice and discrimination on the basis of an individual or group of individuals protected characteristics.

⁽¹⁾ Ireland's equality legislation outlaws discrimination on nine protected characteristics: gender,

civil status, family status, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age, race, and membership of the Traveller community.⁽²⁾ While all of these grounds are protected from discrimination in employment the inaugural IPERN EDI event focused on the topic of gender.

The paramedic profession has traditionally been male-dominated and therefore female leadership roles are relatively rare.⁽³⁾ In Ireland across all clinical levels females comprise just 27% of registered pre-hospital practitioners and at the highest clinical level of Advanced Paramedic this falls to just 16%.⁽⁴⁾

While these numbers have increased in recent years, the IPERN has noted that significant work remains to be done with regard to equal representation across Ireland's Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

'BREAKING THE BIAS'

IPERN launched its EDI Group in celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March 2022.

The event was co-hosted by Dr Niamh Cummins, Public Health Lecturer at University of Limerick, and Grainne O'Shea, Advanced Paramedic. Niamh is the Founder and Chair of IPERN while Grainne is an IPERN Committee Member and EDI Group Leader.

To mark the launch of the EDI Group both Niamh and Grainne hosted a panel discussion entitled



The four crew members lost their lives during the early hours of Tuesday 14 March 2017, when R116 crashed into Black Rock Lighthouse off the coast of North Mayo during a rescue mission (clockwise) - Captain Dara Fitzpatrick and Captain Mark Duffy were recovered, but winch operators Ciarán Smith and Paul Ormsby remain missing.

'Breaking the Bias – The Past, Present and Future for Women in EMS: Perspectives from Ireland, Australia, Canada the UK and the USA'

The IPERN team was joined by a panel of guests including Prof Kelly-Ann Bowles (Monash University, Australia), Cheryl Cameron (McNally Project for Paramedicine Research, Canada), Gemma Howlett (University of Cumbria, UK), Dr Ginny Renkiewicz (Methodist University, North Carolina, USA), Michelle O'Toole (Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland) and Prof Julia Williams (College of Paramedics, UK).

The panellists shared their experiences and hopes for the future of women in EMS. They discussed wide-ranging topics including bias, discrimination and stereotypes, gender equity in the ambulance services, female representation and gender quotas, 'sticky floors' and 'glass ceilings', the importance of allies and advocates and gender-related research.

INCREDIBLE LEGACY WILL LIVE ON

The IPERN team has received the full support of Dara's family to host this award and was joined at the launch in October 2022 by Niamh Fitzpatrick who thanked the network for naming the award after her sister. "Dara was very proud of her work in the emergency services. As a family, we look forward to presenting the award to the first recipient in 2023," she said.

Niamh Fitzpatrick also outlined the values associated with the award, emphasising that compassion and kindness were among the most important qualities valued in a nominee. IPERN Chair Dr Niamh Cummins concluded the network's IWD event by thanking Dara's family for their support.

"It truly is an honour for all of us here in IPERN to be involved in preserving the memory of Dara, our *Banríon na Spéire* (Queen of the Sky).

"We are very proud that Dara's incredible legacy will live on through our future award winners who will be women of strength and bravery, but most of all women of compassion."

References:

1. UN General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Paris, France; 1948.
2. Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. *Making Rights Real: Understanding Rights and Equality Dublin, Ireland: Government of Ireland; 2015* [Available from: <https://www.makerightsreal.ie/understanding-rights/equality/>].
3. Mason P. *Identifying the barriers to female leadership in Paramedicine*. *Irish Journal of Paramedicine*. 2017;2(1).
4. Pre-hospital Emergency Care Council. *PHECC Registration Gender Statistics*. Naas, Ireland 2022.



INAUGURAL DARA FITZPATRICK AWARD

Nominees must be women who work in Emergency Medical Services (full-time and/or volunteer roles) who have distinguished themselves over the course of their career or during a particular callout or event, in one of the following areas:

- Compassion and Kindness
- Strength and Bravery
- Leadership and Teamwork
- Professionalism

The inaugural award will be presented at a special ceremony on International Women's Day on 8 March 2023. For further information email ipern999@gmail.com or check updates on Twitter [@IPERN999](https://twitter.com/IPERN999).

Links to IPERN's EDI Event Recordings

IPERN EDI Event (Full length)

<https://media.heanet.ie/page/7b5a5fb1d64745bbb4af3439f21fe073>

IPERN Dara Fitzpatrick Award

<https://media.heanet.ie/page/b3307b7878d04791a643929d482b1cc8>



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