

## Francis J O'Donnell

**Born:** 1894  
**President:** 1955-1958  
**Died:** 1978

Francis O'Donnell was born on 2 April 1894 at 57 Brighton Road, Rathgar. He went to school at St. Vincent's College, Castleknock, and then studied medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. He graduated with the Licentiates of the Irish Royal Colleges in 1920.

After graduation O'Donnell went to England where he worked in the Bagthorpe Infirmary in Nottingham. While there he studied for the Membership examination of the College, which he passed in 1923 and was elected a Fellow in 1925. He also became a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland. After returning to Dublin O'Donnell was appointed Medical Officer to the Rathfarnham Dispensary District and in 1928 was appointed Honorary Assistant Physician to Mercer's Hospital.

Having developed an interest in skin disorders, and recognizing the great paucity of such specialists in Dublin, he became one of the first Irish members of the British Association of Dermatologists and a prominent member of the North of England Association of Dermatologists. In 1934, in recognition of his expertise in skin diseases, O'Donnell was appointed as the first dermatologist to the Skin and Cancer Hospital, Hume Street. In the early years, however, the focus of that hospital had been on cancer as this was the major interest of Andrew Charles, the hospital founder. O'Donnell brought a new dimension to the work of the hospital and by 1944 a detailed report to the Board of Management revealed that among the thousands of skin cases seen in that institution there were many cases of scabies, septic conditions of the skin, ringworm of the scalp, varicose ulcers, and rarer conditions including adenoma sebaceum, sarcoid and rhinophyma. A Finsen Light, a revolutionary new treatment for cutaneous tuberculosis, was introduced at the hospital during this time. O'Donnell served the hospital for over forty years and it is a measure of the affection with which he was regarded that after his death he was 'laid out' in Hume Street Hospital before his removal for burial.

Frank O'Donnell seems to have had a strong personality and was not afraid of disagreeing with his medical colleagues if he felt this was indicated. He was also intolerant of what he considered to be poor administrative decisions, and was quite cynical about the reconfiguration of the hospital services in Dublin during his later years. He was regarded as 'kindly' by his patients but apparently would not tolerate them deviating from his detailed instructions of treatment. Patients, or their physicians, seeking a second opinion as to diagnosis or treatment of what were often difficult problems with few therapeutic options in those times, were not looked upon kindly by him.



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Another institution that took the interest of O'Donnell was the Apothecaries' Hall of Ireland. This was a longstanding Dublin institution, initially founded in 1745 to regulate the apothecary trade in Ireland, it became a medical licensing body in the nineteenth century. At the time O'Donnell was active the Apothecaries' Hall functioned as a licensing body in medicine and conducted examinations and granted licenses to practice medicine. Over many years he served as an Examiner, Board Member and finally as Governor of the Apothecaries' Hall from 1959-1963, and again in 1970.

O'Donnell was elected President of the College in 1955 on a three-year term. This was a period when there was great economic hardship in the country and there was little to expend on the development of the medical services within the state. It is to his great, and lasting, credit that during his presidency he was instrumental in obtaining significant financial assistance from the Wellcome Trust. This was used to begin the cataloguing of the vast Kirkpatrick Bequest, one of the most significant of the College's historical collections.

O'Donnell was predeceased by his wife and had no children. He died on 30 January 1978 at the age of 84 years and was buried in Bohernabreena cemetery in Dublin.

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