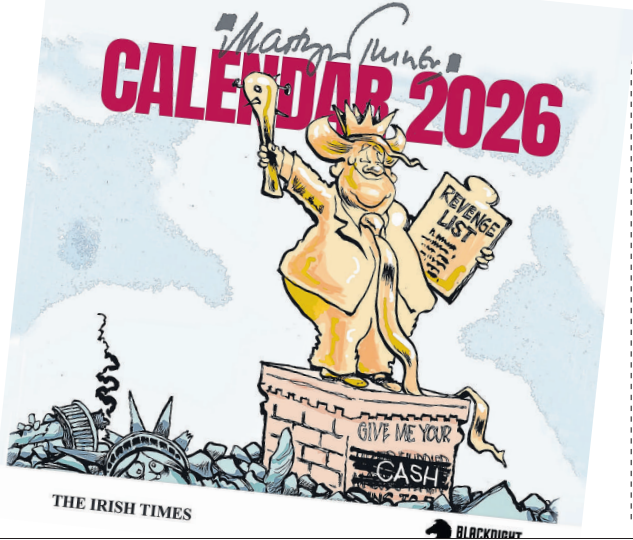


# MARTYN TURNER CALENDAR 2026

Inside today



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# Women to face curbs on private maternity care access

No extension of transitional period for consultants on new public-only contract

New rules to eliminate fee-paying medicine in public hospitals from January

MARTIN WALL

Expectant mothers face increasing restrictions on accessing private maternity services from next week as new rules that aim to eliminate fee-paying medicine in public hospitals come fully into effect.

From the beginning of January, about two-thirds of the 4,700 hospital consultants in the State will be permitted to treat only public patients in HSE-run or State-funded voluntary hospitals. These consultants have signed up to a new Sláintecare contract introduced by the Government in 2023.

The Department of Health has told health insurers that transitional arrangements that allowed specialist doctors in public hospitals, who signed the new Sláintecare contract, to wind down their private practices over a number of years will not be extended beyond the end of December.

The HSE confirmed the end of the transition period in a memo to its senior management on December 18th.

The Irish Hospital Consultants Association (IHCA) said while the new rules would apply to all medical specialities, they would particularly affect obstetrics.

IHCA chief executive Jim Daly said that, unlike other medical disciplines, there were no private maternity units in operation across the State where women could access such care.

Studies suggest that just under 25 per cent of women nationally opt for either private or semi-private maternity care, with this rising to about one-third in some units.

Consultants in obstetrics and other specialities who have not

signed up to the public-only contract can continue to see private patients in State-run and State-funded facilities.

Mr Daly maintained that under the new contract, consultants working under the new Sláintecare contract would also be permitted to continue to see private patients in public facilities if local management agreed. He believed that management in some maternity hospitals would be agreeable to such a stance.

However, he said health insurers would from the beginning of January no longer pay for subscribers treated by a consultant in a public hospital who operates under the new contract.

VHI, the country's largest health insurer, told The Irish Times that from January 1st, it would "not process claims for private activity in a public hospital where the consultant has completed their transition period under the public-only contract".

However, the State-owned VHI said it would "continue to pay charges where a member chooses to waive their entitlement to public treatment and opts for private care with an admitting consultant who holds a contract type that permits private practice in a public hospital".

Laya Healthcare said: "We have been informed by the Department of Health that the 31st December 2025 deadline for the end of private practice by public-only consultants in public hospitals will be enforced. We understand that there will be no extension to this deadline, and we are planning on that basis."

Mr Daly said as all new consultants since 2023 were appointed under the Sláintecare contract and could only see public patients in State hospitals, private practice would be eliminated over time in these facilities.

➔ **Sláintecare reforms 'will limit maternity care choice': page 3**



## Baby, it's cold outside Bathers take to the sea

■ Amy Alperin (left) and Shannon Levine warm up after enjoying a Christmas Day swim at Sandycove beach in south Dublin. Many avoided the nearby Forty Foot, a traditional Christmas Day bathing spot, due to high waves and rough seas yesterday.

PHOTOGRAPH: BRYAN O'BRIEN/THE IRISH TIMES

# A Christmas Day dip: 'We'd do it again in a heartbeat'

SARAH BURNS  
in Sandycove

Shannon Levine, from San Francisco, emerged from the water at Sandycove Beach in south Dublin on Christmas morning laughing "I can't feel my toes".

Shivering alongside her swimming companion, Amy Alperin (56) from New York, the friends said "if us old ladies can do it, anyone can".

The pair were among dozens of people who turned out to the beach early yesterday as swimmers took their festive dips at Sandycove due to high waves at the nearby Forty Foot bathing area.

Ms Levine (55) and Ms Alperin had travelled over to Ireland for 10 days with their families, having met through their adult sons who are college roommates at Indiana University.

"We just needed a challenge and a refresh," said Ms Alperin. "The rocks were the hardest part, they were tougher than the cold."

"I don't think the water was nearly as bad as I thought it was going to be. It feels like New York in the bay area ... It was really fun."

"Meanwhile our 20-year-old sons are sleeping

in the hotel. We would do it again in a heartbeat. Next time, we're bringing the boys."

The friends said they were due to attend mass at St Patrick's Cathedral but had no plans for Christmas dinner later.

"Maybe Chinese food?" added Ms Alperin. "We're not sure what's open so we didn't plan anything."

Over at the RDS in Ballsbridge, Dublin 4, more than 400 people gathered for



the annual Christmas Day dinner. The event, now in its 101st year, is organised by the Catholic order of the Knights of St Columbanus for those in need.

Paul Fagan (48), originally from Ballybrack in Dublin, said he had been coming to the event "on and off" for the last 30 years.

Mr Fagan was homeless for 28 years before being provided with long-term accommodation by the Dublin Simon

Community last year.

"The people that run this are absolutely amazing because if it wasn't for these, I would be sitting in my flat on my own," he said.

"I always need to get out and come to things like this and meet people and just not to be on your own."

"It's very hard being homeless for so long and shaking that off. Twenty-eight years is a long time to be on the streets, living in flats, temporary hostels."

Ian MacCluskey (57), originally from Glasnevin, Dublin said this was his first time coming to the order's dinner.

Mr MacCluskey is currently homeless and has been staying at a hostel in the city centre over recent months.

He said two of his brothers had died over recent years and his family situation "hasn't been the same since".

"I didn't want to spend Christmas on my own so I thought it would be a bit of craic here," he said".

➔ **'Definitely a difference in the spuds': Christmas in 'Co Coogee': page 2**

# Irish shipwrecks offer up treasure and tragedy

CONOR GALLAGHER

A cannonball, a "ghost ship" and the remains of a vessel carrying 43 tonnes (43,000kg) of gold were among the items washed up on Irish shores in recent years.

The finds were notified to the Office of the Revenue Commissioners under laws which require anyone who finds shipwrecked items to report them to the authorities.

The Department of Transport has a network of Revenue officials around the country to act as "receivers of wreck".

It is their job to take possession of wrecks, assess their value and, if possible, find their owners. If a wreck is found by a salvager, it is up to the receiver to sell it and pay them a portion of the funds.

Any wreck which goes unclaimed after a year must be referred to the director of the National Museum for assessment of its historical importance. The State is entitled to take possession of a wreck not claimed within a year.

Details of items taken into possession by receivers of wreck since 2015 were released following a Freedom of Information request. Twenty reports were received during this period, with eight in the

last year. Last October, timbers believed to be from HMS Saldanha washed up on Ballymastocker Beach in Co Donegal. The Saldanha was a British frigate built in 1807 to patrol the Irish coast during the Napoleonic Wars. She wrecked during a storm near Fanad Head in 1811, resulting in the loss of all 273 crew. The captain's parrot survived and flew to shore, only to be shot by a farmer the following year.

In October 2016, items from British steamship the Boniface, including four portholes, washed ashore. The ship was sunk by a German U-boat in 1917 off Donegal.

That same month in 2016, a porthole from SS Laurentic washed up. The transatlantic ocean liner was secretly carrying 3,211 gold bars to Canada and the US to purchase munitions for the UK when she struck sea mines laid near Lough Swilly in January 1917.

She sank with the loss of 354 crew. All but 22 of the gold bars were recovered during various salvage operations over the years.

Some finds remain shrouded in mystery, including an object appearing to be a cannonball recovered as part of a "solidified mass" off the coast of Rosslare, Co Wexford in 2015.

## Home News

**Christmas:** Only 5 per cent of Irish people ever ask for a receipt so they can return an unwanted Christmas present. [Page 3](#)

**Probate:** A nurse who cared for a very ill man in a Dublin hospital was left €25,000 in his will. [Page 2](#)

## World News



**Vatican:** Pope Leo decried conditions for Palestinians in Gaza in his Christmas sermon yesterday. [Page 7](#)

## Business This Year

**DAA:** The rift between the DAA board and Kenny Jacobs has caused a headache for Darragh O'Brien

## Sports Friday

**Soccer:** Former Nottingham Forest and Scotland winger John Robertson died at the age of 72, it was announced

## Weather

Dry and sunny in most areas. Cloudier near the south coast. Cold, with highs of only 4-8 degrees.

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