

PQ Rep IEHG
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20th June 2019

Deputy Micheál Martin T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
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Re: PQ 22872/19 – Patient safety concerns in the acute medical assessment unit in St. Luke's Hospital.

“To ask the Minister for Health if his attention or the attention of the HSE has been drawn to patient safety concerns in the acute medical assessment unit in St. Luke's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Martin,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question seeking an update on whether or not the attention of the HSE has been drawn to patient safety concerns in the acute medical assessment unit in St. Luke's Hospital, which has been referred to the Ireland East Hospital Group for direct response.

I have had this matter investigated and am advised that the Acute Medical Assessment Unit (AMAU) at St. Luke's General Hospital (SLGH), which was established in 1999 - cared for 8,592 emergency medical patients during 2018.

In this regard, due to the work done with all stakeholders in the past 20 years – ranging from our Primary and Community care colleagues to internal and external stakeholders, it has become one of the busiest and most developed Acute Medical Assessment units in Ireland. Consistently – 80% of Medical patients are streamed through our AMAU which is further testament to its developed pathways.

The AMAU in St Luke's General Hospital is fully compliant with the recommendations of the National Acute Medicine Programme. Given the continued increase in demand and activity on year and the recognition of value of AMAU's as the best model of care for medical patients, SLGH has continued to develop and invest in the service over the years.

In 2015 the AMAU moved to a new capital build, within the Acute Floor, which is a purpose-built facility that affords patients privacy and dignity during their episode of care, whilst also giving them access to the care and medical technology that are appropriate to their needs. We continually assess the level of staffing resources needed to ensure that the unit is appropriately staffed, particularly with Senior Decision makers, which are key to ensuring that the unit works as an ambulatory care service. SLGH has collaborated with the National Acute Medicine Programme and the Royal College of Physicians in this regard.



By its nature, as an emergency and ambulatory service, clinical risk is inherent on a daily basis. The AMAU is subject to the same clinical governance protocols – namely, the reporting, monitoring and reviewing of all clinical incidents/near misses, as all other services of the hospital. The Executive Management Team of St Luke's and IEHG (Ireland East Hospital Group) are satisfied that there are no causes for concern around patient safety in the AMAU.

The main research demonstrates that an AMAU has the potential to improve the cost and quality of care provided by, reducing length of stay, readmission rates, mortality rates, trolley times, bed occupancy and waiting times for diagnostics. Acute medical units have been shown to improve the efficiency of acute medical care, by increasing the proportion of patients discharged within 24 hours and by decreasing length of stay and overall medical bed day usage. A number of studies demonstrate that the introduction of an acute medical unit (AMU), combining assessment and short-stay function, is associated with a decrease in hospital mortality for medical patients and no increase in re-admission rates. The benefits of AMUs are derived through the efficient streaming of medical patients to a location where they can be seen without delay by a senior medical doctor (i.e. a consultant, specialist registrar or registrar who has the competencies and experience to make a prompt clinical diagnosis and decide the need for specific investigations and treatment, the mode of treatment and the most appropriate setting for that treatment and ongoing care). Advantages from the patient's point of view are that extended waiting times are avoided and that a senior doctor is likely to determine with greater accuracy whether or not they need to be admitted. If admission is required, this will occur within a defined time period and the patient will be admitted to the most appropriate clinical area in the hospital. If admission can be avoided, the patient will have access to appropriate and timely outpatient follow-up. Well organised AMUs also improve efficiency by eliminating duplication of clinical assessment and unnecessary diagnostic testing.

There is a body of evidence in the related scientific literature which proves the case for the AMAU's in relation to patient safety (Byrne D, Silke B. Acute Medical Units; review of evidence. European Journal of Internal Medicine 2011; 22:344-7)

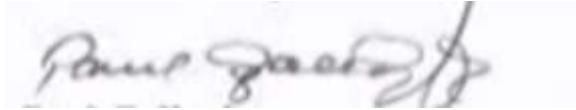
In addition to reviewing clinical incidents/near misses that have been reported to the Clinical Risk Department, the AMAU at SLGH has been participating in a comprehensive Unscheduled Care Service Improvement Programme over the past 3 years, with the support of the Ireland East Hospital Group. The AMAU has been involved in much of this work as it is such a pivotal part of our Unscheduled Care/ Medical Service.

This has involved taking a structured and proactive approach (using Lean Healthcare Service Improvement methodology) to examine the many elements of the quality of care provided and the patient's experience - ranging from data analysis to listening to the 'voice of the customer' and many of our stakeholders were invited to provide constructive feedback. St Luke's regularly receives positive feedback from service users, but welcomes all feedback, whether a patient had a positive or negative experience in the unit. As a training hospital, it is imperative that the hospital listens to patient and GP feedback, in order to continually improve the services, we provide to the patients in our area.



I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely



Paul Gallagher
Chief Director of Nursing and Midwifery