



Oifig Stiúrthóir na Seirbhíse Náisiúnta Otharcharranna,
An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Otharcharranna,
Áras na hAbhann,
Crosbhóthar Thamhlachta,
Tamhlacht,
Baile Áth Cliath D24 XNP2
Fón 01 4631624/6.
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Office of the Director of the National Ambulance Service,
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Ref: MD/SD/PA/210323

23rd March 2021

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House

Re: PQ/13315/21

To ask the Minister for Health the steps being taken to improve the ambulance service in Connemara, particularly in the more remote areas of west and north Connemara; the effect of the improvements to date on the waiting times for ambulances, particularly in acute cases; if it is planned to locate a new base in a central location in Connemara (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Éamon Ó Cuív

Dear Deputy Ó Cuív,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above representation.

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) is the statutory Pre-Hospital emergency and intermediate care provider for the state. The NAS operates from over 100 locations across the country, responds to over 360,000 ambulance calls (2020), employs over 2,000 staff and has a fleet of over 500 vehicles, including Rapid Response Vehicles (RRV) and Motorbike Response Units (MRU). In conjunction with its partners, the NAS transports approximately 40,000 patients via an Intermediate Care Service, co-ordinates and dispatches more than 800 aero medical / air ambulance calls and completes 600 paediatric and neonatal transfers.

The call taking and dispatch function is operated by the NAS National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) which operates on one digital platform across two sites, Dublin and Ballyshannon. All NAS resources are dispatched to calls across the country from the NEOC on a nearest available (to the incident) basis and not on a county boundary basis. NEOC utilises an Advanced Medical Priority Dispatch System (AMPDS) which utilises international standards in triaging and prioritising emergency calls. This system ensures that life threatening calls receive an immediate and appropriate response, while lower acuity calls may have to wait until an emergency resource becomes available.

The NAS has established a clinical hub to implement the 'Hear and Treat' alternative care pathway for low acuity calls that don't require the dispatch of an emergency ambulance. NEOC dynamically deploys resources to areas where cover is required or to respond to incidents as they arise to ensure the nearest available resource responds to emergencies. Care begins immediately the emergency call is received, where life-saving pre-arrival assistance is given by the emergency call takers directly to the patient or any third party that





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is available to assist. This pre-arrival care includes the delivery of medications, CPR, use of defibrillator, haemorrhage control, childbirth and many other emergencies that present.

At a local level, the NAS is also supported by 275 (Dec 2020) community first responder schemes, responding to particular types of medical emergencies (i.e. cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, chest pain, choking and stroke) where it is essential for the patient to receive immediate life-saving care whilst an emergency response vehicle is en route to the patient. These schemes are supported by dedicated NAS staff, Community Engagement Officers located in the West, South and East of the country.

The service is moving towards a more multi-dimensional urgent and emergency care provision model which is safe and of the highest quality. This is in accordance with international trends, the desire to implement the recommendations of the various reviews into the service and the ultimate aim of improving patient outcomes whilst ensuring appropriate and targeted care delivery. The NAS will deliver, in line with Sláinte care and the Trauma System for Ireland, an Ambulance reform plan and this will be part of our strategy as we move forward from Strategy Vision 2020 into the next phase.

Delivering high levels of care is the priority at the NAS and the NAS College, in conjunction with University College Cork (UCC), is where all NAS Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics and Advanced Paramedics receive training and on-going revalidation. The college has the latest training aids and simulators which ensures comprehensive training in a consistent manner for all staff. Training is further provided for the Irish coastguard, the Defence Forces, An Garda Síochána, health care professionals and members of voluntary organisations. The range of courses includes patient care programmes, leadership courses, tutor development, major incident planning and preparation and driving. The college further provides vocational and professional education and training to ambulance and associated personnel based on current best practice, to meet the strategic and operational needs of the National Ambulance Service and the Health Communities and Patients it serves.

The owner of the proposed site at Maam Cross indicated that a planning application had been made and therefore they would not be in a position to assist. In addition, there was no commitment given by the National Ambulance Service to allocate additional service development resources to the area of Connemara.

We are providing Deployment Points in some of the Primary Care Centres including Ballinrobe, but to fully utilise these it would require staff to be deployed from centres such as Castlebar.

If for example we could find a suitable site in the catchment area of Maam back toward Oughterard or further west, but this would need to be part of a HSE facility or controlled by the NAS and not a shared facility. It would have to be acceptable to management operationally to justify the allocation of resources and also staff as a safe place to work from





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the site needs to be suitable, safe for staff to work from to include minimum facilities, access, egress and parking.

The Deputy Director of the NAS and other Senior Operational Managers of the NAS, conducted a review of emergency calls across the entire state to establish an evidenced based approach, in line with the baseline capacity review, to the allocation of additional resources to locations that are highlighted within this review and to assist in the service development decision making process. As you may be aware additional resources, have in the last number of years, been placed in areas of Galway and Tuam.

I trust this information is of assistance to and should you require additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

Sharon Dunne, Executive Assistant
Office of the Director, National Ambulance Service