

CC/PT/MC

Email: pgmidwestacute@hse.ie

26th July 2022

Mr Peadar Toibin TD,
Dàil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 38148/22, PQ 38149/22

To ask the Minister for Health if any capacity and demand analysis in relation to bed numbers has been carried out on the supply of emergency and critical care at University Hospital Limerick as recommended by the Health Information and Quality Authority in 2009; if so, the number of studies and analyses that have been conducted; and the findings of those studies. -Peadar Tóibín

To ask the Minister for Health the reason that University Hospital Limerick never received extra beds despite a higher number being deemed the necessary number of beds to provide safe emergency and critical care, following the closure of Nenagh Hospital. -Peadar Tóibín

Dear Deputy Toibin,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Historical bed capacity shortages in the Mid-West region have been well documented. ULHG has the lowest inpatient bed capacity when benchmarked per population against other Model 4 Hospitals, an additional 200 inpatient beds would be required to bring ULHG in line with the national average.

It should also be noted that the allocation of funding for capital development projects is decided nationally and not by UL Hospitals Group. While additional beds are welcome, the Group has consistently stated that even sizeable ward block developments of the kind opened at University Hospital Limerick in the past two years would not fully address the long-standing, well-documented hospital bed shortfall in the Mid-West.

This is not to minimise the importance of additional beds. We added an additional 98 beds at UHL and an additional 10 critical care beds in response to the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020/2021. This new capacity has enabled us to keep vulnerable patients safe, including haematology, oncology and renal patients; to provide a safe pathway for people attending UHL for surgery; and to isolate COVID-positive patients.

As you are aware, the reconfiguration of health services in the region a number of years ago led to bed closures in both Ennis and Nenagh Hospitals. Unfortunately, new capacity was not provided to make up for these shortcomings namely due to the global financial crisis of 2008.

Below is a breakdown of how inpatient bed capacity and emergency attendances at UHL compare to other Model 4 hospitals:

Hospital	Inpatient beds	ED attendances 2021
St James' Hospital	698	48,397
UHL	530	76,473
Mater	614	89,335
SVUH	510	60,748

It is the belief of UL Hospitals Group that the Mid-West must have an Elective Hospital to serve the well described needs of patients in the Mid-West.

UL Hospitals Management team and senior clinicians met the Minister for Health on the 17th February 2022. Clinicians outlined the crisis for elective care and reiterated the core requirement for an elective hospital. Concerns were raised regarding the Mid-West not being included in national plans for elective sites, now agreed for Galway and Cork.

In addition, the HSE Support Team from the Performance Monitoring and Improvement Unit continue their work on the UHL site. The team is working jointly with UL Hospitals Group and HSE Mid-West Community Healthcare to respond to current pressures faced at UHL. The role of the support team is to drive a programme of work to respond to the unprecedented levels of demand for services in the Mid-West Region and to support and oversee the implementation of rapid improvements.

The aim of the support team is to:

- Remove Ward Trolleys
- Improve and Protect Streaming Pathways
- Improve and Protect Elective Pathways
- Reduce Emergency Department Congestion

Admissions through the ED at UHL account for 83% of inpatient bed days, leaving limited capacity for elective activity. Frequent cancellations of elective activity to accommodate increases in demand for emergency care have resulted in long and growing inpatient/day-case waiting lists.

We welcome the recent significant investment and bed capacity provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, however it does not sufficiently address the well-documented bed capacity shortcomings in the Mid-West region, nor does it adequately address the continuing growth in demand for emergency care.

In addition to inpatient bed capacity shortages, there is a need to significantly increase the number of NCHDs employed at University Hospital Limerick in order to alleviate growing pressures and to support new consultant posts approved by government in recent years. An additional 68 NCHDs are required to adequately address the shortcomings outlined above. Please see below for a breakdown:

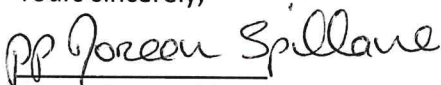
Staff Grade	WTE required
Registrar	31.00
Senior House Officer	31.00
Senior House Officer (ED)	6.00
Total	68.00

Our next significant project in terms of bed capacity is the 96-bed block for UHL. The development of the new four-storey, 96 single bed acute inpatient ward block extension at University Hospital Limerick has full planning permission, fire certification and is fully designed.

It is envisaged that when the new 96-bed block opens, approximately half the beds will be used to replace older bed stock on the UHL site. This stems from a long-identified need to move away from nightingale wards to single en-suite rooms in hospitals due to cross-infection issues.

I trust this clarifies the position, please contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



Prof Colette Cowan
Chief Executive Officer
UL Hospitals Group