

CC/RS/MD

Email: pgmidwestacute@hse.ie

27th February 2023

Róisín Shortall TD
Dàil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

PQ 7610/23

To ask the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1516 of 18 January 2023, the number of beds allocated to patients transferred via ambulance to Nenagh and St. John's Hospitals, respectively; the additional resources that will be put in place in both hospitals to facilitate this new pathway; if surgeries have resumed in Ennis; if surgeries will be cancelled in St. John's to facilitate the change in protocol; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Róisín Shortall

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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.

As you are aware, the Medical Assessment Unit (MAU) pathway for 112/999 patients was recently introduced in Ennis and Nenagh Hospitals. It allows stable medical patients that meet the agreed clinical criteria to be treated in a Model 2 hospital. A key element is a telephone referral from the treating paramedic to the receiving MAU doctor, which ensures that the right patient is brought to the MAU.

Please note, this pathway has not yet been introduced at St John's Hospital, it is envisaged that similar measures will be introduced in the near future.

This pathway will result in patients receiving medical treatment in a hospital closer to their home, will reduce patient presentations to Emergency Departments and will release ambulances more quickly to respond to other emergency calls. 112/999 patients that do not meet these clinical criteria will continue to be transported to Emergency Departments for assessment and treatment.

The Medical Assessment Units in Ennis Hospital and Nenagh Hospitals treat patients referred by GPs, ShannonDoc and now NAS paramedics.

It is important to note that the introduction of the new ambulance pathway did not require an expansion in physical capacity at either site. To support the roll-out of the pathway in Nenagh Hospital, there has been a slight increase (0.5 WTE) in nursing resources.

The Medical Assessment Units at Ennis, Nenagh and St John's Hospitals had their busiest year to date in 2022 with 12,737 patients being seen. This represents a 19% increase on 2021.

We have recently submitted a bid to the HSE National Acute Division for €5.2m for additional resources to increase staffing across all three MAUs in our Model 2 Hospitals. Additional staff would allow us to extend the operating hours and open the Medical Assessment Units in Nenagh and St John's to 7 days a week and increase the number of slots currently available to GPs, ShannonDoc and NAS paramedics. The bid also includes permanent funding for Ennis MAU to secure the extended hours and weekend service into the future.

Separately, reductions in scheduled care early in the new year have been a feature of our winter plan in recent years to allow us manage surges in medical patients associated with winter viruses and illness. Accordingly, there was no elective activity scheduled in our hospitals during the first two weeks of January.

However, this year's surge in demand for beds exceeded capacity to the extent that, as per our Escalation Plan, additional reductions in scheduled care were necessary, delaying the resumption of day surgery in Ennis Hospital and Nenagh Hospital, where beds on the day ward were used as surge capacity for medical inpatients.

The gradual resumption of day surgery at Ennis Hospital commenced on Thursday, February 9th. This has been under review on a daily basis, as we continue to have high numbers of inpatients across our sites, and ongoing high numbers of attendances at the Emergency Department in UHL.

Last week, an amount of day surgery at Ennis and Nenagh, and inpatient surgery in St John's Hospital, had to be cancelled in order to create surge capacity. We apologise to all patients impacted, who are contacted directly, and will be offered a rescheduled appointment at the earliest opportunity.

Please note, the introduction of the Medical Assessment Unit (MAU) pathway for 112/999 patients is a separate matter and no surgeries had to be cancelled to facilitate the introduction of this measure.

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