

8th March 2023

FAO: Public Representatives in Wexford

Re: Update regarding Wexford General Hospital (WGH)

Dear Deputy/Councilor,

I want to acknowledge the support and help many of you have provided to WGH during the course of the last week. I know numerous local and regional politicians have reached out to staff in the Hospital, including myself, to offer your assistance. It is much appreciated.

I am also acutely aware that many of you have received countless calls from concerned patients, family members and constituents. I am sure some of you had family caught up in the fire and subsequent evacuation last week, therefore I appreciate this is a difficult time for the whole region.

I hope this letter will help alleviate some of your constituents' concerns; while I want to be honest and clear regarding the timeline to fully reopening WGH again.

Shortly before 16:00 last Wednesday, 1st of March, the fire alarm sounded in the Hospital. After a quick investigation, it became clear that a serious fire had broken out on the fourth floor of WGH. After a Horizontal evacuation and conversations with the Wexford Fire Service, it became apparent that the situation was becoming extremely dangerous due to the fire's close proximity to multiple flammable gas cylinders. Shortly after 18:00, I declared a Major Incident and ordered a full evacuation of the Hospital. Wexford Fire Service had the fire under control after several hours and had a presence at the Hospital over night as a precaution.

Once a Major incident was declared, the HSE South East Crisis Management Team convened a telecon. This brought together all the relevant stakeholders. It became clear very quickly that our colleagues in NAS and across the acute and community healthcare system were going to help us through the challenge of evacuating an entire Hospital.

During the evacuation on Wednesday we transferred 98 patients to hospitals across the country including UHW, St Luke's, SVUH, MMUH, CHI, NMH, Beaumont and CUH. We also transferred patients to Gorey District Hospital and St John's Hospital, Enniscorthy. At the same time, we discharged 91 patients from WGH.

Since then, St Luke's General Hospital and UHW have both seen an increase in attendances to their Emergency Departments.

Once the appropriate transfers were complete, our Hospital staff commenced the recovery stage of the process. Gardai, HSE Estates and the Health & Safety Authority started the process of inspecting the site of the fire, which is still ongoing.



Our staff were offered the opportunity to attend the Hospitals where our patients were sent, to help and assist. Some staff have been temporarily redeployed. 29 patients remained on site in WGH; therefore we still required a team in the Hospital.

The priority is now working with HSE Estates to determine how long it will be before we can become fully operational again.

At present expert teams from HSE Estates are revaluating and assessing the damage caused by Wednesday's fire. The cause and source of the fire is still unknown. It will be weeks before we receive the reports that will tell us this.

However, in the short term our priority is to reopen the Hospital on a phased basis. Once it is safe, we have the services available and capacity allows, we will begin the process of opening the Hospital systematically.

The first example of that was last Friday when we were in a position to open the Maternity unit. The start of this week saw us recommence all scheduled Outpatient and Radiology appointments.

I know many of you will be concerned regarding our Emergency Department. I want to be clear: the ED is closed. Although I cannot give you any clarity as to when the unit will reopen, please be assured that it will open as soon as possible. It may be some time before we are in a position to open it at full capacity, due to the volume of in-patient beds currently unavailable.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your support to me personally, to my staff and to our patients. We have just completed the largest evacuation in the history of the HSE. To do that we needed the support of every healthcare system and public body in the locality. Communicating with the local population was a huge part of this and, to your credit, you helped the hospital get the key messages out there in a calm and reassuring way.

I hope to update you further in the coming weeks regarding our recovery. In the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my office on 053-9153156.

Yours sincerely



Linda O'Leary
Hospital Manager, Wexford General Hospital.

