



**Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta
Géaroibríochtaí**

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15th June 2023

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 25631/23 - To ask the Minister for Health the steps that are being taken to ease the continuing overcrowding issues at emergency departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Jim O'Callaghan.

Dear Deputy O'Callaghan,

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.

The challenges experienced by patients and staff given the high occupancy levels in our hospitals including our Emergency Departments (EDs) are well recognised. We are now taking an all-year round approach to managing urgent and emergency care. We are working on plans across the health service to support better patient flow through our hospitals and improve the experience of patients attending our EDs - work is underway to put a plan in place for the remainder of this year and we are working on a longer term plan for urgent and emergency care for the next 3 years.

By way of background, you should note our hospitals have experienced an increase of 6% in attendances to its Emergency Departments so far this year, versus the same period in 2019. This equates to 35,000 additional attendances. This led to an increase in admission of 4.9% equating to almost 7,500 additional admissions to our hospitals.

In this regard, significant work has been and continues underway to develop and enhance integration of hospital and community services to reduce overcrowding in hospitals by supporting patients through hospital avoidance measures and reducing length of hospital stays in order to free up capacity for patients who need to be admitted after attending an Emergency Department. Examples of these initiatives includes the following:

- Enhanced community care (ECC) pathways
- Community Intervention Teams
- GP out of Hours
- GP diagnostics
- Provision of additional transitional care beds for egress.

The HSE implemented a Winter Plan in 2022/23 which included 608 additional whole time equivalents (WTE) to support the delivery of hospital and community services, at a cost of €169m, to build and enhance work from



previous years, of which there were bespoke plans for each hospital consisting of 447 WTEs, in addition to initiatives for Safer Staffing for nurses in our Emergency Departments and 51 Emergency Department Consultants plus 20 Registrars. The balance of the 608 posts were assigned to Community initiatives and other supports. This funding is recurring and recruitment to the posts remains ongoing.

From a hospital capacity perspective, 997 new acute beds have been delivered since 2021, and plans are underway to increase this to support the hospital sites most under pressure. Whilst this project is being delivered, the HSE have utilised up to 200 beds in the private hospitals and are working to maintain this capacity in the meantime.

As mentioned above, the HSE is currently developing a 3 year Urgent & Emergency Care Plan which includes an in-year plan for the coming winter. This will provide a framework for continuation of ongoing measures to manage the ever increasing demand of Health Services. The addition of nursing and health care assistants to the EDs and Hospital general wards continues under the Safer Staffing Framework, and there is currently a specific project underway by community colleagues to review the number of delayed transfer of care (DTOC) within our hospitals to improve process in the first instance and match capacity to support appropriate and efficient discharge.

Work continues on a daily basis to ensure current levels of available capacity are maximized and patient flow processes are optimized by the hospitals and community care to minimize the impact of overcrowding.

I trust this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jacqueline McNulty'.

Jacqueline McNulty
General Manager
Unscheduled Care Acute Operations