

CC/MB/MC

Email: pgmidwestacute@hse.ie

24th October 2023

Mr Martin Browne TD,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

PQ 43488/23

To ask the Minister for Health the progress made to date in the urgent and emergency care operational plan for 2023 at University Hospital Limerick; the progress made to date in immediately addressing the overcrowding and capacity issues at University Hospital Limerick ahead of a further increase due to winter demand; if further use will be made of Nenagh, Ennis and St. John's Hospitals in addition to the measures taken already; the additional measures put in place in communities across the Mid-West to reduce presentations at UHL; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Martin Browne

Dear Deputy Browne,

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.

In order to respond effectively to the sustained and record pressures that are being experienced throughout the year and beyond winter, the HSE has introduced a new approach to improve Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) in the form of a Three-Year Multi-Annual UEC Plan.

The HSE UEC Operational Plan 2023 outlines key measures and initiatives which will be delivered to support UEC, with a particular focus on ED operations, timely discharges and patient flow. This includes continuing to put additional resources in place to support our frail, elderly patients to avoid unnecessary emergency hospital admissions. Based on lessons learnt and on the basis we anticipate we will be entering another multi-pathogenic season (including flu, COVID-19 and RSV) this plan also includes specific surge measures.

UL Hospitals Group and HSE Mid West Community Healthcare have developed an integrated unscheduled and emergency care plan for the Midwest region which has been submitted to the HSE nationally for approval. The

first phase of this plan will focus on capitalising on existing pathways of care during the coming challenging winter period. These measures include:

- **ED admission-avoidance for over-75s:** In October 2022, UL Hospitals opened the new Geriatric Emergency Medicine (GEM) unit at UHL, and expanded the OPTIMEND Allied Health-led assessment & admission-avoidance service for the over-75s, through the recruitment of an additional 25 WTE staff. These include physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy who assess elderly patients in ED with a view to avoiding unnecessary admission to hospital. Up to the end of August 2023, the GEM unit saw 1,233 patients. Of these, 61% of patients were discharged and 13% were transferred to other hospitals.
- **Pathfinder:** Q4 2022 saw the introduction of Pathfinder, a collaborative ED-avoidance programme run by the Group's allied health staff and the National Ambulance Service (NAS). Pathfinder aims to deliver safe alternative care at home for over-65s in the Limerick region, Monday to Friday, 8am-8pm. As of June 2023, the Pathfinder service has been extended to Clare and North Tipperary.
- **Alternative Pre-Hospital Pathway:** A new collaboration between UL Hospitals Group and the National Ambulance Service will see definitive care provided in the community to patients who call 999/112 - and reduce the number of ambulances bringing patients directly to the Emergency Department.
- The expansion of our GP-referral **Medical Assessment Units** to seven-day services across the region, with the dedicated MAU pathway for ambulance calls implemented in Ennis, Nenagh and St John's.
- Rostering (within existing resources) is in place to support patient flow on a 7/7 basis for senior decision makers, staff integral to patient flow and health and social care professionals in the ED.
- Expansion of inpatient diagnostics to meet Urgent and Emergency Care demand.

In line with Sláintecare reforms, a number of integrated care initiatives are in operation to look after patients as close as possible to home. Examples of this in Limerick include:

- The **Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons (ICPOP)** service provides rapid access to a multidisciplinary delivered Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (CGA) for older adults who have frailty or are developing frailty. Appointments are offered within one week of the referral being received. There is no active waiting list. Under ICPOP, an average of 740 assessments and interventions were completed each month in 2022, while 240 monthly Diagnostics, including MRI, CT, X-Ray and Dexa scans were conducted.
- National expansion of **Community Intervention Teams (CITs)** has a particular focus on the Mid West and North West regions. These teams focus on hospital avoidance and early supported discharge to the person's home. Community Intervention Teams in the Mid-West are currently supporting an average of approximately 760 people each month.

- Increased funding is being provided for additional **GP access to diagnostics in primary care**, allowing for patients to be referred directly for x-rays or scans. This service delivered in excess of 15,500 scans in 2022 and 12,225 YTD 2023.

In addition, we continue to ask members of the public to familiarise themselves with available care options and to avoid the ED except in cases of severe or life-threatening illness or injury. This allows us prioritise urgent care for those who need it most.

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

Yours sincerely,



Professor Colette Cowan
Chief Executive Officer
UL Hospitals Group