

16th August 2013

IAEM Welcomes opening of interim Emergency Department at Letterkenny General Hospital

The Irish Association for Emergency Medicine warmly welcomes tomorrow's reopening of a functioning Emergency Department (ED) at Letterkenny General Hospital. Since 26th July 2013 the Donegal hospital has been closed to emergency admissions (other than Maternity and some Paediatric admissions). This closure follows severe damage to much of the hospital's infrastructure as a result of torrential rain and flooding.

Over the past 3 weeks Trojan efforts have continued to open an interim ED with the necessary hospital infrastructure in place, particularly diagnostic imaging (radiology). The completion of these enabling works has allowed an emergency facility to be provided again on the Letterkenny campus, albeit in a temporary building. While warmly welcoming the re-opening of the service, the Association recognises that the capacity of the service will be less than that of the ED which was damaged in the flood. It is imperative therefore that the hospital actively provides parallel patient pathways to ensure care for those who need urgent hospital input but do not have life- or limb-threatening needs appropriate for an ED. An effective Medical Assessment Unit and access to urgent outpatient care is essential to avoid overwhelming the interim ED, with consequent risks for patients.

The Association recognises the significant burden placed on neighbouring EDs over the past weeks. This burden fell disproportionately on Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry initially but over the past fortnight the majority of patients have been seen in the ED at Sligo Regional Hospital with some patients also being seen in Altnagelvin and at the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen. The efforts of medical, nursing, clerical and support staff in these adjacent units is very much appreciated by the Association. In addition, the efforts of the National Ambulance Service which transported large numbers of patients from the Letterkenny catchment area to alternative destinations are also acknowledged.

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The difficulties for Letterkenny catchment area patients resulting from the temporary loss of a functioning ED in Letterkenny have confirmed the necessity for a 24/7 ED to remain on the Letterkenny site into the future. Even though there are currently too many Emergency Departments in Ireland, Letterkenny is one of a specific group of EDs whose geographical isolation mandates an ongoing ED presence and further service development in the future, a view echoed in the national [Emergency Medicine Programme report](#) published in June 2012.