

9th January 2013

IAEM laments the Health Service's failure to eradicate the "Trolley Problem"

The Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly TD, promised that the scandal of in-patients waiting on trolleys in Emergency Departments (EDs) for hospital admission would have ceased by the end of 2012. Regrettably this has not happened.

In spite of the clear commitment given to adopt a *zero tolerance* policy to ED overcrowding in the aftermath of the publication of the [Emergency Department Task Force Report](#) in June 2007 and more recently the [HIQA Tallaght Report](#) in May 2012, little of substance has actually happened. The Government, HSE and Special Delivery Unit (SDU) repeatedly trumpet 'improvements' yet a 20% improvement in the truly appalling 2011 figures (which included the nadir of 568 patients awaiting hospital admission on trolleys in EDs on 5th January 2011) cannot be seen as representing real progress. Indeed comments from a HSE spokesperson as recently as 18th December 2012 to the effect that the previous day's unacceptable figures of 340 patients on trolleys around the country were "[no particular cause for concern](#)" suggests that health services management are as far away as ever from adopting the required *zero tolerance* approach. Judging by the lack of concern, the failure to understand the very significant adverse mortality and morbidity implications for patients of ED overcrowding obviously continues unchecked amongst senior HSE managers. This is in spite of an extensive body of evidence, both internationally and nationally, that ED overcrowding results in avoidable patient deaths.

The 345* unfortunate people of Ireland waiting for a hospital bed today, particularly the elderly, those with chronic illness and the infirm (who are those most likely to end up on a hospital trolley awaiting hospital admission) can be forgiven for asking whether this major public health issue is being taken seriously by those responsible for managing our Health Service. The clear evidence over the last decade is that it isn't.

* *The number awaiting admission as of 08.00hrs on 9th January 2013*

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