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IAEM expresses serious concerns about the impact of recent government actions on recruitment to senior positions in Emergency Medicine

For over a decade, the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine (IAEM) has argued for a significant increase in the number of senior (clinical) decision makers in the country's Emergency Departments (EDs) so that patient care could be optimised. The Comptroller and Auditor General's report in 2009 noted the continued serious shortage of senior decision makers in EDs and recommended that this matter be addressed. The national Emergency Medicine Programme (EMP) report launched by the Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly TD, in June 2012, committed the Health Service to significantly increasing the number of senior decision makers to a level consistent with international norms.

Senior decision makers include Consultants in Emergency Medicine (EM) and doctors at Middle Grade level who will become the Consultants in EM of the future. Unfortunately, recent decisions, including that to disadvantage new entrant Consultants relative to their peers, will reduce the number of doctors pursuing a career in Emergency Medicine in Ireland. The impact on Middle Grade recruitment (which is currently a major challenge in many EDs) will be immediate. This shortage of Middle Grade doctors will subsequently result in a further reduction in the number of applicants for Consultant posts. Already within the past year a number of advertisements for Consultant posts have received no applicants. This scenario is likely to significantly worsen.

Unless there are adequate numbers of doctors applying for Middle Grade and Consultant posts in the specialty, it will not be possible to continue to provide the current level of service, much less meet the ambitious targets of the EMP. IAEM therefore urges that immediate consideration is given to this matter and steps taken to ensure, in whatever ways are necessary, recruitment of high calibre specialists to EM. Failure to do this in a timely manner will result in insufficient numbers of candidates for appointment to newly created posts and even to replace Consultants who retire. This will put at risk the ongoing viability of Emergency Department services, including services in hospitals crucial to the on-going delivery of emergency services in the reconfigured hospital system.

Irish graduates are highly sought after for EM posts all over the English-speaking world. In these healthcare systems, they attract terms and conditions that realistically reflect the intensive and stressful nature of EM. The recent Ministerial decision threatens to cause large-scale emigration of EM doctors. The consequences of this decision will be very negative for the stability of the emergency care system and the patients it serves.

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