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HSE Action Contributing to Worsening ED Overcrowding

The news that almost 1,400 inpatient hospital beds are unavailable in the face of worsening Emergency Department (ED) overcrowding is a cause for serious concern.

Of the closed beds, more than 600 are inaccessible because they are occupied by patients who have completed their acute care but have no alternative accommodation to go to (so called 'bed blockers'), while 791 beds are closed mainly as a result of "cost containment".

Relatively minor cost savings are achievable with ward closures, particularly when the number of patients requiring acute hospital admission significantly exceeds the available bed compliment. ED overcrowding has been shown internationally to result in increased patient mortality. ED overcrowding has also been shown to increase the length of hospital stay and therefore increases the cost to the health service.

The current widespread policy of blunderbuss ward closures will inevitably result in worse patient outcomes and additional long term costs.

The Association therefore calls on the HSE to ensure that all Acute Hospitals which have Emergency Departments provide enough inpatient beds for those patients who require inpatient admission, even if this requires the re-opening of currently closed beds.

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