

20<sup>th</sup> December 2007

## **Increased pressures on Emergency Departments over the Christmas and New Year period**

The Irish Association for Emergency Medicine (IAEM) notes with concern the tendency for community and other health facilities to be wound down over the Christmas and New Year period. The recent HSE decision to close an elderly care unit in Nenagh and then to seek to defend this as “prudent housekeeping” is an example of necessary community facilities being rationed. Patients are therefore moved to other hospital beds with inevitable increased pressures on acute hospital services and Emergency Departments (EDs).

The IAEM notes that Professor Drumm (Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Executive) has repeatedly stated that he wishes to see increasing amounts of the current patient-care workload transferred from the acute hospital setting to the community. Yet at every festive period, community facilities are routinely closed resulting in their legitimate workload being transferred back to hospitals. Given that many acute services are also run down (inappropriately) during this period, this inevitably causes increased pressure on already over-pressurised EDs who end filling the vacuum left by the withdrawal of these services.

Furthermore, in 2007 the public should ask whether there is any other developed western country which does not have a Public Health or a Social Work Service outside office hours to deal with the inevitable workload that arises during the festive period. In addition, can the HSE continue to defend the provision of, at best, skeleton essential services to support EDs through one of the busiest periods of the year?

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