

21st April 2011

IAEM expresses grave concerns about major staffing deficits which will result in unplanned Irish Emergency Department closures in July

For the past 2 years the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine has been highlighting the increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining junior doctors to staff our country's Emergency Departments (EDs). Despite IAEM and other representative medical bodies giving repeated warnings and proactively engaging with the HSE, there has been a persistent and sustained deterioration in the situation, bringing us now to a frightening watershed point.

The HSE has, this week, acknowledged publicly that from 11th July 2011 there will be a shortfall of over 400 doctors in the Irish hospital system. The HSE Human Resources Directorate's lack of adequate long-term medical workforce planning and their failure to respond effectively to the recruitment crisis has allowed the current nadir to be reached. It beggars belief that, despite more doctors than ever graduating from Irish medical schools, a career in Irish medicine is so unattractive and unpopular that locally trained doctors are emigrating *en masse* and overseas trained doctors no longer wish to work in Ireland. From both a health and economic perspective this represents a major loss to the country of capable doctors whose education has been supported by the taxpayer. Despite clear advice to the contrary, HSE HR persisted with an ill judged and ill-timed, disastrous central recruitment process for non-rotational training posts which has worsened an already precarious situation.

It is disingenuous of the HSE to state that a concurrent uplift by 25% in Consultant numbers since 2005 (from an internationally low baseline) offsets junior doctor shortfalls in EDs and other critical services when many of these new appointments have been to new, developing or non-critical services.

There is a very real danger that many EDs will be unable to provide a safe 24 hour service for our patients and that services may be unavoidably curtailed on some sites this July. We are deeply concerned at the effect that this unplanned change in the provision of emergency care will have on patients.

We urge the HSE to face up to its role in the recruitment debacle, protect essential emergency services and apply innovative approaches to retain their remaining medical staff. Irish Hospitals need to be made attractive once again to doctors of all grades from at home and overseas.

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