



Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

123 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2
Ireland

www.emergencymedicine.ie

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IAEM response to developments at Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Limerick

The Irish Association for Emergency Medicine warmly welcomes recent moves to improve patient safety in the Emergency Department (ED) of the Mid-Western Regional Hospital. On Tuesday 1st December 2009, in the face of increasingly unsafe and overcrowded conditions in the ED, a directive was issued by senior HSE management that a proportion of the admitted inpatients waiting on trolleys in the ED be transferred to inpatient wards. While this marginally increased the number of inpatients on individual wards, it greatly reduced the extreme overcrowding in the ED.

The detention of patients, whose ED care has been completed beyond the time that the decision to admit has been made, results in increased mortality and morbidity. This has been confirmed by an increasing body of international evidence. By contrast, the practice of lodging one or two additional patients on inpatient wards has been shown to be safe in a comprehensive 4 year study in the USA. This has been termed the *Full Capacity Protocol*. It has also been shown that this practice reduces the length of hospital stay.

The Association advocates strongly that once standard measures to reduce Emergency Department overcrowding fail HSE managers should institute the *Full Capacity Protocol* as was done with such success in Limerick this week.