

6<sup>th</sup> January 2015

## **IAEM Expresses Serious Patient Safety Concerns as Emergency Department Crowding Worsens**

The Irish Association for Emergency Medicine is gravely concerned about the patient safety implications of the increasing numbers of patients on trolleys in Irish Emergency Departments (EDs). Unless steps are urgently taken to decant patients from grossly crowded EDs, it is inevitable that patients will die and others will have much worse medical outcomes than they should have, resulting in longer lengths of stay and additional health service costs as well as avoidable grief and suffering.

The historical pattern of ED crowding is that it worsens through the month of January and it is inevitable therefore that the situation will worsen significantly unless appropriate steps are urgently taken. These steps must include:

- Transfer of the approximately 800 patients whose acute care is finished from acute hospital beds to appropriate alternative facilities. These facilities include long stay residential care, Nursing Homes or the patient's own home with appropriate community supports in place;
- Acceleration of processing of patients through the Fair Deal scheme;
- Prioritisation of the emergency workload at a time when hospital bed capacity is so severely constrained.

It should be obvious to all at this stage that the oft-trumpeted 'improvement' in trolley numbers claimed by the HSE and Department of Health simply hasn't happened. It is only with clear prioritisation, consistent political direction and far more active management by individual health service managers that the significant worsening of the situation will be halted and hopefully reversed. If this isn't done, the avoidable but sadly predictable deaths of more of our citizens, visitors, relatives and friends will inevitably occur.

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