

23rd January 2018

IAEM welcomes early Cabinet consideration of the Bed Capacity Review and urges a rapid and positive response

The Irish Association for Emergency Medicine has argued for many years that there is a serious shortage of acute and community bed capacity which is at the heart of Ireland's ED crowding problem and results in needless deaths and unnecessarily poor medical outcomes. This contention is borne out by the OECD comparisons of acute bed numbers / 1000 population which show that at 2.6, Ireland is well short of even the OECD average of 4.3.

The bed capacity review findings have been widely leaked. It is clear that the case that we are very short of hospital beds has been finally accepted. Even if the most optimistic view is taken of what Slaintecare may do to address the Irish healthcare system's over-reliance on acute hospital care, the reality is that many thousands of beds will be needed and this need is now. It is imperative that immediate steps are taken to definitively address this capacity shortage. In the short-term this may require the use of modular accommodation while work is undertaken to plan and execute the necessary capital developments. It is particularly important that this issue is not long-fingered yet again and the Association hopes that the Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD, will be able to convince his cabinet colleagues of the need to respond positively and definitively to the report. Suggestions that new beds may not be delivered for another decade will only condemn further patients to dying unnecessarily.

It should be borne in mind that with the level of ED crowding that is sadly the norm in Ireland; it is likely that some 350 to 400 excess deaths are occurring each year based on the current Irish population, a population that continues to increase. The inertia shown in addressing this glaringly obvious bed capacity deficit to date must not continue and political leadership needs to be shown to ensure that the necessary bed numbers (and the required healthcare professionals to staff them) are provided without further delay and obfuscation. Allowing the unacceptable situation to continue by suggesting that the new beds will not be commissioned for a decade will condemn a further 3,500 to 4,000 of our relatives, friends and neighbours to a premature and avoidable death. This is the equivalent of accepting that every man, woman and child in a town such as Birr, Clonakilty, Listowel or Macroom be allowed die unnecessarily.

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