

Emergency nurses and doctors warn against return to overcrowding

Emergency departments and hospitals must not return to overcrowding in the coming weeks, emergency nurses and doctors have said.

The warning came as part of the first-ever joint statement between the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine and the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, who represent frontline nurses and doctors in emergency departments across the country.

Their statement cautions that the “problems of the past” may emerge again as the health service gradually ramps up non-COVID activities.

They warn that overcrowding and understaffing may lead to increased infection risk, poor patient outcomes, and unsafe workplaces.

The joint statement calls for measures to counteract this, including:

- Retention of access to private hospitals until a vaccine is secured,
- Immigration and travel priority for migrant health professionals,
- A commitment that no recruitment embargoes will apply to doctors or nurses,
- Extra priority and decision-making powers in the community to avoid unnecessary emergency department referrals,
- A working group to urgently look at staffing issues in the health service.

Irish Association for Emergency Medicine President, **Dr. Emily O’Conor**, said:

“We need to reset care in Ireland’s Emergency Departments and allow care continue to care for those patients that need EM expertise in a way that is safe for patients and staff.”

INMO General Secretary, **Phil Ní Sheaghda**, said:

“Overcrowding, understaffing and COVID-19 pose a triple threat to patients and staff alike.

“Emergency department and hospital overcrowding is always unacceptable, but it is exceptionally dangerous when added with the risk of COVID-19 infection.

“We have never seen trolley overcrowding figures as low as the past few weeks. We must build on that and resist any return to the problems of the past.

“In the short term, that means keeping the extra capacity of the private sector, prioritising immigration of migrant health professionals, and no

more recruitment embargoes. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past.”