

3rd March 2023

IAEM commends work of staff, emergency services and volunteers in ensuring safe outcome to fire at Wexford General Hospital

All of Ireland was horrified by news of Wednesday's fire at Wexford General Hospital (WGH). It is remarkable, and worth celebrating the fact, that the hospital was safely evacuated of over 200 inpatients without loss of life or injury to patients, staff or members of the emergency services deployed to the scene.

The Irish Association for Emergency Medicine wishes to commend the hospital and other staff involved in this herculean task. The difficulty of having to safely move so many patients, some ventilated, some confused and unable to help in their own evacuation, many with infusions running, some having just given birth etc. should not be underestimated. The fact that this was done in a safe, efficient and pre-planned way is a tribute to the staff involved, the effectiveness of the hospital's fire plan and the prior training undertaken by the staff of WGH.

Yet again, the event brought out the best in the emergency services with the Wexford County Fire & Rescue Service supported by other local fire services in extinguishing the fire. The evacuation resulted in patients being transferred to a number of other hospitals, some in excess of 200km away. This represented a major incident for the National Ambulance Service which had to deploy resources from a significant distance, bolstered by the assistance of Private and Voluntary Ambulance Services. The impact on already overstretched supporting hospitals also needs acknowledgement.

In the permanently pressurised acute hospital environment with Emergency Departments often lodging scores of hospital inpatients and additional patients on wards being the new norm, activities such as Fire Training and exercising a hospital's Fire Evacuation plan are easy targets to be long-fingered. Thankfully this short-sightedness was not the case in Wexford and the patients and staff that were in the hospital at the time of the fire have been the beneficiaries of this prudent approach to dealing with such an infrequent but potentially lethal event.

It is important that the Department of Health and HSE prioritise the creation of the necessary acute bed capacity so that a fire in another hospital doesn't lead to the tragedy Wexford could so easily have been.

President:

Prof Conor Deasy
FRCEM, PhD
Consultant in Emergency Medicine
Cork University Hospital
Wilton, Cork
T12 DC4A
Ireland
Tel: +353 87 963 0654

Secretary:

Dr Owen Keane
BA (Mod), MB BCH BAO, FRCEM
Consultant in Emergency Medicine
Beaumont Hospital
Beaumont Road, Dublin 9
D09 V2N0
Ireland
Tel: +353 1 809 3245

Treasurer:

Dr. Áine Mitchell
FRCEM
Consultant in Emergency Medicine
Sligo University Hospital
The Mall, Sligo
F91 H684
Ireland
Tel: +353 71 917 4505