

Save Our Acute Services: News Release

15th April 2024

Health Campaign group welcomes Department of Health review into patient care and dignity in Western Trust area

Following BBC & ITV exposure of two shocking cases where patients were kept days in a staff locker room in Altnagelvin, campaign reveals that it knows of a third case

Hospital campaign group, Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) has welcomed the announcement by the Department of Health (DoH) that it will be conducting a review of patient care and dignity in light of two cases coming to light where patients were kept days in a staff locker room in Altnagelvin with no toilet or emergency buzzers.

SOAS revealed that it was aware of a third case where a patient from Fermanagh had spent 14 days in February this year in the same “hell hole” locker room. The Department of Health has stated that it will conduct a review into the cases and stated that patients must be treated with dignity and care at all times.

Pressures on Altnagelvin have mounted after Western Health & Social Care Trust (WHST) management withdrew emergency general surgery (EGS) from South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) in December 2022 meaning that all patients needing surgery have to attend the hospital which is located more than two hours drive away from many parts of Fermanagh. In addition to the huge pressures on staff and facilities at Altnagelvin, SOAS researchers have catalogued more than 250 cases where Fermanagh patients have received care which it claims failed to provide them dignity and care.

At the time of removing EGS from SWAH, WHST bosses told local councillors and the Department of Health that there was ‘reasonable capacity’ at Altnagelvin. Since that time, Trust management have repeatedly asserted that no patient outcomes have been affected and no negative clinical outcomes have been recorded as a result.

SOAS campaign spokesperson Donal O’Cofaigh said, ***“The two cases revealed by the BBC & ITV in recent days are only the thin end of the stick but yet again they put the lie to the assertions by WHST spin doctors. Our research team have catalogued in great detail more than 250 cases where Fermanagh patients have had adverse experiences and did not receive the care and dignity that they deserved. Indeed we know of a third case where a Fermanagh patient has spent 14 days in the same locker room in February.*”**

“The decision to remove EGS from SWAH was taken forward by Western Trust bosses against the wishes of the outgoing Health Minister. No risk assessment was conducted and the promised mitigations have proven entirely worthless, if not totally false. Health care workers have been left in a terrible situation; in SWAH they have to watch as patients are sent all the way to Altnagelvin for treatment, a hospital where the staff there know there is no room for them and which is already under huge pressures.

“While we welcome the review by the Department of Health into these cases and to ensure patient care and dignity, we need to see a much wider review into patient safety, patient outcomes and pathways. We have no Trust in the Western Trust bosses and we reiterate the call for them to go.

“The Department of Health needs to recognise that healthcare reconfiguration is not a zero-sum game. If you shut down capacity at one hospital it does not simply transfer to another hospital; what happens is that you simply lose that capacity. The price for this policy mistake is being borne by healthcare staff and patients and their relatives in places like Fermanagh. The treatment people are receiving here is not just second-class but fundamentally dehumanising. The Department must intervene and publicly commit itself to restore EGS at SWAH.”

ENDS...

For further information or to arrange an interview contact Donal O’Cofaigh, SOAS Spokesperson tel. 07810 157926.

=====

Notes:

1. Link to ITV Article ‘Woman spends week at Altnagelvin Hospital on a trolley in a staffing area’:

<https://www.itv.com/watch/news/woman-spends-week-at-altnagelvin-hospital-on-a-trolley-in-a-staffing-area/ghyyq7g>

2. Link to BBC Article ‘Trust admits lack of dignity for some patients’:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c51n8dr5ny1o>