



## Save Our Acute Services press release

11 October 2024

### Long awaited hospital framework threatens second class status for South West Acute Hospital (SWAH)

#### Campaign rejects logic of giving more powers to the unaccountable Western Trust.

Fermanagh-based hospital campaign group Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) has challenged the Health Minister Mike Nesbitt on the failure of his draft hospital framework 'Hospitals - creating a network for better outcomes' to propose the return of emergency surgery to SWAH. Instead, the new framework proposes to downgrade SWAH to a second-class 'general' hospital with priority openly being given to the first-class 'area' hospitals.

SOAS spokesperson Donal O'Cofaigh said, *"The context for this framework is one of impending service collapse across many areas of our health service especially emergency departments but this is totally ignored. Instead, there is a total focus on elective care and the need to get waiting lists down."*

*"The Health department can surely tackle more than one serious issue at a time but there is an entire section on elective care while shockingly there is not the same for emergency care. There's virtually no mention of developing an emergency care hospital network framework that will address the current collapse in the ambulance service and EDs."*

*"SOAS seeks an integrated approach to development here and fully accepts that this must be done within the confines of overall hospital network development across Northern Ireland; however, this must address both emergency care and elective care."*

*"Our geography is at the heart of this argument. Altnagelvin and Craigavon ED are just too far away to enable timely enough care for people from this area. The only change to any pathway that will ensure we get equitable access to emergency care is to have emergency surgeons returned to SWAH."*

*"The vast majority are willing to travel past their nearest hospital in order to get elective treatment; however, it is neither safe nor acceptable to ask people who have suffered any kind of an accident or major trauma to travel the distances that face the community in Fermanagh and South Tyrone."*

SOAS also expressed concerns for the additional and unaccountable powers to be given to Trust bosses under the framework:

*"The framework proposes giving Trusts the powers to impose changes 'even if they have not concluded and/or completed their consultations'. Experience shows that the Western Trust bosses cannot be relied upon to make evidenced and appropriate decisions; indeed, their risk register reveals they're preparing to permanently remove emergency surgery at SWAH. Giving them these additional powers means the public will have no meaningful say and will allow trust senior management to simply ignore evidence of risks to the public and frontline staff."*

SOAS plans to respond more fully to the draft framework when it presents its roadmap for returning emergency general surgery on a sustainable basis to SWAH. That roadmap which will be presented in coming weeks will include local care provision focused on emergency cases, an increased regional elective workload supported by new specialities, and crucially an increase in North-South treatment for both emergency and elective patients.

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For further information or to arrange an interview, contact SOAS spokesperson Donal O'Cofaigh, tel. 07375 530941.