

Save Our Acute Services: News Release

4th November 2024

*** North-South co-operation offers potential to restore NHS services in SWAH. ***

*** Health Minister Mike Nesbitt acknowledges that “SWAH was built on the basis of co-operation across the border”.***

Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) has called on Mike Nesbitt to seize North-South opportunities as a way to restore NHS Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital. The call followed comments made by the Health Minister during an Assembly debate on his Department's recently published framework document “Hospitals - Creating a Network for Better Outcomes”.

In response to a question from Matthew O'Toole MLA, the Minister stated that “SWAH was also built on the basis of co-operation across the border”. Earlier he responded to a question from Deborah Erskine MLA, saying that “it is possible to think about imaginative ways in which to tackle those workforce challenges and not simply buy into a narrative that a rural hospital will not attract a workforce”. The Health Minister did not elaborate further.

Spokesperson for SOAS, Donal O'Cofaigh challenged the Minister. *"Health was one of the six areas of co-operation established under the Good Friday Agreement. Indeed, the North-South co-operation was a major element in the business plan which led to SWAH being built in the first place.*

"It is hard to believe now that this central border region has failed to develop any meaningful co-operation whatsoever over twenty years. Indeed, it has fallen behind everywhere else. The result is a vacuum of acute and emergency health provision across the central border area. Instead of services being linked up and strengthened, ambulances are not even allowed to take patients across the border except in exceptional circumstances including major incidents."

"Co-operation between hospitals closely located across the border with both patients and staff able to come and go would make a huge difference to the ability to attract and retain staff and build services. It has the potential to underpin the full restoration of NHS services in South West Acute Hospital and open the door to the hospital being a leader on the island as a whole.

"Mr Nesbitt's reconfiguration document fails in any way to consider the potential for North-South co-operation and linkages to sustain and restore NHS services in places like Enniskillen. There's no reference to the fact that addressing gaps in the availability of major trauma treatment in border areas is already a stated recommendation by the HSE in the Republic of Ireland.

"We can't afford to wait any longer while these opportunities are squandered. Our community cannot and will not accept being treated as second class when it comes to emergency surgery and trauma services any longer. We need to see real ambition in developing the North-South potential."

ENDS

=====