



Save Our Acute Services press release

3 January 2025

***Decision to hold hospital reconfiguration consultation event outside Fermanagh branded an insult. ***

Health Minister Mike Nesbitt challenged to intervene and ensure a public consultation event is held in Fermanagh

***Fermanagh public encouraged to enrol and attend Omagh consultation event. ***

Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) has encouraged members of the public to enrol for the upcoming Omagh consultation event on the Department of Health's proposed hospital network reconfiguration. The event is due to be held at the Silverbirch hotel at 7pm on Wednesday 15th January. The event is the only one scheduled in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

The hospital network reconfiguration consultation 'Hospitals - Creating a network for better outcomes' is considering proposals which will effectively amount to a permanent downgrading of South West Acute Hospital (SWAH). Under the plan, SWAH will be accorded 'general hospital' status as opposed to the other acute hospitals in Northern Ireland which will be given 'area hospital' status. This will make permanent the 'temporary' removal of emergency general surgery from SWAH leaving more than 83,000 residents in Fermanagh and South Tyrone more than an hour away from life-saving emergency surgery.

When the consultation was initially launched, SOAS criticised the absence of any public consultation events, even online, but in recent weeks the department has announced one to be held in each Trust area.

Spokesperson for Save Our Acute Services, Donal O'Cofaigh said: *"This hospital reconfiguration consultation will determine the health future of our area for years to come. It proposes to make permanent the removal of emergency general surgery by downgrading of SWAH to the secondary tier of being a "general hospital". This will mean that while it provides emergency treatment this will not include emergency surgery. Over time this will threaten other acute services at the hospital and will put huge strain on Altnagelvin which is already struggling to cope.*

"Given our geography the absence of emergency surgery anywhere in Fermanagh or Tyrone means our entire population will be made second class citizens when it comes to access to life-saving surgery in an emergency or a major trauma. We have higher risks from farm or road accidents but that reality is just being ignored. The result will be more lives lost and scarred by the unreasonable distances to access what are essential services.

"It seems the only voice that counts to the mandarins in control of our health service is the private sector medical businesses who want services stripped from rural areas and concentrated in the cities where they can piggyback to make the greatest profits.

"To add insult to injury, the only public consultation event on our hospital's downgrading will be held outside Fermanagh. Minister Nesbitt must urgently intervene to redress this disgraceful situation. Our community cannot be treated with such disrespect and disdain.

"In the meantime, SOAS encourages anyone who can make it to book their place at the consultation event in Omagh. We need to register the strength of our opposition to this attack on our community's access to basic and life-saving health services. Those in authority need to understand that we will not accept permanent second-class status when it comes to health care."

ENDS...

For further information or to arrange an interview with a campaign representative contact Donal O'Cofaigh, SOAS spokesperson tel. 073 755 30 941.

To book tickets it is necessary to do so online via this link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/whsct-consultation-event-doh-creating-a-network-for-better-outcomes-tickets-1117916962729>