

Save Our Acute Services: News Release

21st January 2025

*** The number of patients going through SWAH is only half that was planned for ***

*** Far fewer patients being treated in SWAH than were treated in old Erne hospital ***

Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) is continuing a campaign of community and political engagement following launch of their Roadmap to restore emergency general surgery at South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) last week. The campaign's positive Discussion Paper identified 20 recommendations which seek to establish a pathway for the sustainable restoration of emergency services at SWAH. The group argues that the full potential of the hospital can be realised in order to meet health needs locally, regionally and on a North-South basis.

The document set out a number of objectives - including the full utilisation of SWAH's capacity. The hospital has five theatres, two of which have never been commissioned, and was built with amenities to accommodate an additional 92 beds. The business case for the hospital was based on activity levels of 27,753 patients a year (comprising inpatients and day case patients).

Official statistics confirm that at no stage since opening have hospital activity levels reached this target. The highest activity level reached was 18,810 in 2016-17 - marginally exceeding two-thirds of the target. It has trended downwards since. In 2023-24 activity levels were down to 13,596 - less than half the original business case target.

Moreover, in no year since the doors opened at SWAH did activity levels even reach those at the former Erne hospital which was 22,825 in 2007-08.

SOAS Spokesperson Donal O'Cofaigh said, *"These figures are genuinely concerning. SOAS will continue to shine a light on the extent of unused capacity at SWAH. It is clear that the Western Trust must do better. The good news is that they can do better. The 20 recommendations in the Discussion Paper provide an evidenced roadmap for developing a long-term sustainable solution for SWAH and Omagh HPCC.*

"Activity through the hospital has never exceeded two-thirds of the target and it now languishes at half the target. It is genuinely concerning that despite this hospital having such world-class facilities at no point did activity in SWAH come close to that at the old Erne Hospital.

"Our roadmap is an attempt to turn the page positively. Our recommendations aim to enable a realistic pathway back to achieve the full utilisation of SWAH. Our community deserves better. Indeed, the NHS in Northern Ireland deserves better. SWAH has a huge contribution to make. It only needs ambition and political will to make that happen."

"The location of Altnagelvin on the Northern edge of the Trust means that it cannot safely deliver essential emergency services to the South West region. SWAH needs to be categorised as a 'Rural Area Hospital' in the current public consultation and the number of patients coming through it must increase to make sure it delivers a long-term sustainable future for our community. "

ENDS...

For further information or to arrange an interview with the campaign contact Donal O'Cofaigh, SOAS PRO
tel. 07375 530941.

Note for editors:

[1] SOAS is holding 3 public meetings on the Discussion Paper 'SWAH – an integrated Roadmap':

Belcoo – Community Centre – Thursday 23rd Jan – 8pm

Lisnaskea – Castle Park Centre– Monday 27th Jan – 8pm

Irvinestown – date and location to be confirmed

[2] Summary of activity in SWAH for last 10 years – alongside original business case plan and 2007/08 activity in old Erne Hospital.

