

Save Our Acute Services (SOAS): News Release

29th January 2025

Review deemed 'shocking' by local campaign group SOAS

Minister must commit to reinstate emergency surgery to South West Acute Hospital (SWAH)

SOAS has welcomed the publication of a review by the Health Regulator, Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) into pathways put in place following the 'temporary' withdrawal of emergency general surgery from SWAH. The campaign understands the review was provided to the Department of Health three months ago but it is only now being made public.

The review was conducted in response to mounting, often traumatic evidence provided to the regulator about patient experiences by the community. These raised significant patient safety concerns. Patient and staff safety are of the utmost importance to SOAS' campaign and the reason that the campaign calls for the restoration of emergency general surgery to SWAH.

The review confirms that the pathways put in place by the Western Trust are severely compromised. This review findings vindicate the warnings that SOAS has made to the Department that the continued absence of emergency surgery at SWAH was putting lives in danger.

Campaign spokesperson Donal O'Cofaigh said: *"This report is truly shocking.*

"The Trust's response to the recommendations in this RQIA Review is to do exactly as they did already in May last year when they had their 'reset week'.

"The reset did not work then.

"We do not believe that it will be any different at this time.

"Experience tells us that we can have no confidence that the Western Trust management will be any more capable this time than they were in May. The Minister must step in."

"Our community has been let down and has suffered. The staff in our hospital have been put under unfair pressure. We know from the recent winter hospital crisis that time really matters. Yet we continue to be treated as second class citizens. The pathways put in place can never fix what is a geography issue – we are just too far away from emergency and trauma treatment."

"The Western Trust claims they have neither the authority nor the influence to implement the changes needed to restore surgery to our hospital. They have also stated they will restore emergency surgery if the Department of Health tells them to. The Minister must now commit

to restore emergency surgery at SWAH. He carries ultimate responsibility for ensuring our community's fundamental human right to timely access to life saving emergency surgery.

“SOAS invites the Minister to meet us and hear the proposals in our Discussion Paper ‘SWAH – an integrated Roadmap’ for the sustainable restoration of our emergency surgical service and the full utilisation of its capacity.

“We will study in detail the RQIA’s findings as well as the response from the Department and the Western Trust. We will present a detailed assessment of that and, if necessary, a demand for further investigation into what is happening.”

“We would like to thank everyone in the community – patients and staff – who contributed their experiences to the review as well as the RQIA team for the work they have done and for the professionalism they showed throughout the process.

ENDS...

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

Note for editors: