



Save Our Acute Services (SOAS): Press Release

Monday 19th May 2025

*** Save Our Acute Services questions whether people of Fermanagh and Tyrone are being held to ransom over delay in provision of additional ambulances ***

*** Health campaign group Save Our Acute Services called on the Health Minister Mike Nesbitt to urgently intervene to ensure patient safety at SWAH and to make a wider commitment to restore emergency general surgery at the hospital ***

The campaign issued the call in response to the publication of minutes for the February 2025 board meeting of the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHST). These stated that WHST Chief Executive Neil Guckian reported that the Department of Health would not make additional funding available for additional ambulances needed at South West Acute Hospital until the withdrawal of emergency general surgery at the hospital was made permanent.

The need for extra ambulances was one of two 'urgent' priorities identified by health regulator, RQIA, in its review of the safety of patient pathways at SWAH following withdrawal of surgery from the hospital.

SOAS spokesperson Donal O’Cofaigh said, "***RQIA identified two Urgent priorities in its Review - the ending of the ‘double ED experience’ and the provision of extra NIAS Emergency ambulances. The WHST has already made it clear it cannot resolve the ‘double ED’ issue and now we are told that the money from the Dept of Health will not be there for extra ambulances until the withdrawal of surgery from SWAH is made permanent.***

“This is a matter of huge concern. Any move to make permanent the withdrawal of life-saving emergency surgery from the South West would set in stone our community’s second-class status. It would also cut across the commitment by public representatives of all five main political parties that they seek the restoration of emergency surgery at SWAH.

“People are asking whether our community is now being held to ransom. We are told the money for ambulances to safely transport patients to Altnagelvin is to be withheld until the decision is made permanent. SOAS is calling on Minister Nesbitt to intervene to ensure patient safety now in Fermanagh and Tyrone - that means implementing the RQIA recommendations as well as committing his Department to work towards the full and sustainable restoration of emergency general surgery at SWAH.”

ENDS...

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

Notes for editors:



[1] The Western Trust Board Meeting Minutes for 6th February 2025 are available at this link:
<https://westerntrust.hscni.net/download/916/trust-board-papers-2025/21834/minutes-of-trust-board-meeting-6-february-2025.pdf>

[2] Extract from Western Trust Board Minutes 6th February 2025:

EXTRACT (6th Feb 2025 Western Trust Board Meeting Minutes)

2/25/9

RQIA REVIEW OF THE PATHWAYS RESULTING FROM THE TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF
EMERGENCY GENERAL SURGERY AT SOUTH WEST ACUTE HOSPITAL

“Mr Guckian referring to the Review Report’s recommendations said there were a number of themes. Referring to ED to ED transfer and capacity within the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, Mr Guckian said in the meetings of the All Party Group and the Strategic Development Group, the DoH and Prof Mark Taylor were in attendance and it was very interesting to hear that in relation to the issue of additional funding for the Ambulance Service, the DoH will not give additional funding until the temporary change is made permanent.”

“Dr McGinley said looking at what is reported, and again in respect of communication, the recommendation for additional funding for NIAS, and that the change needs to be permanent for this to happen, she felt the public has a right to know that this is the case.”