



## Save Our Acute Services (SOAS): Press Release

Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025

**\* Calls for Minister for Health to reschedule hospital network reconfiguration plan to allow ‘vision plan’ for SWAH to be incorporated \***

**\* Hospital campaign group SOAS expresses concerns over current timing and evidence underlying hospital reconfiguration \***

Save Our Acute Services (SOAS) has written to Minister for Health Mike Nesbitt raising concerns about the planned issuing of his report on the ‘Hospitals – creating a Network for better outcomes’ public consultation. At a recent meeting of the health committee, a spokesperson for the Department of Health indicated that the report would be published in coming weeks. SOAS ask whether it is appropriate to report on this Hospital Network public consultation when there is so much uncertainty and uncompleted work surrounding the positioning and value of SWAH within our hospitals network. We agree with the Minister when he says that a vision for SWAH is missing at the moment and that it is critical that one be developed.

In July, the Minister for Health took the unprecedented step of intervening to halt a public consultation by the Western Trust on a proposal to make permanent the withdrawal of emergency general surgery (EGS) from SWAH. He advised the Trust ‘use this immediate time to restore confidence by producing a vision plan emphasizing how SWAH will be supported to meet both the needs of its current and future population’. No actions to deliver that vision plan have occurred in the intervening two months.

Correspondence received by SOAS this week from the Minister for Health, stated that there was “no need to await any individual Trust vision plans before publishing the outcome of the Hospital Network consultation”.

Over 30,000 submissions were received to the Department of Health’s Hospitals Network consultation – more than 28,000 of which were in support of SOAS’s call for SWAH to be afforded special ‘Rural Area Hospital’ status. This status would lead to the restoration of EGS at the hospital.

SOAS spokesperson Donal O’Cofaigh said: ***“Our campaign has written to the Minister for Health to emphasize our concerns. The draft regional Hospital Network plan proposes that SWAH be classified as a general hospital. The location of Altnagelvin on the Northern periphery of the Trust means that it is unable to safely and efficiently deliver the required full range of emergency services to the South West region. Consideration must be given to providing a range of essential emergency care services to SWAH that cannot be guaranteed by the definition of a General Hospital. SWAH would be best categorised as a ‘Rural Area Hospital’ that recognises its unique mix of being a medium sized hospital in a remote location delivering full emergency and elective care.***

***“Due to the prolonged delay by the Western Trust in developing the vision plan called for by the Minister, there are mounting concerns that the Hospital Network consultation will pre-empt and***



***pre-judge that process. Any Hospital Network reconfiguration must recognise the unique geography of Fermanagh and Tyrone and our community’s need for access in emergency and trauma situations.”***

The health regulator, the Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) conducted a review of the safety of patient pathways last year following the ‘temporary’ withdrawal of EGS from SWAH. In that review, the regulator confirmed that there was insufficient data available to determine the effectiveness of the pathways – a situation which continues until today. At Northern Ireland level, there has also been no centralised collection or analysis of data relating to major trauma within our hospital network – since a cyber-attack on the TARN (Trauma Audit Research Network) database in June 2023.

***“SOAS is highlighting concerns that the Hospital Network strategy is being developed in the absence of data which the health regulator stated was needed to determine the effects on patient safety linked to the suspension of surgery in SWAH. There has also been no national trauma-related database since a cyber-attack in June 2023. It is a concerning prospect that what is meant to be a once-in-a-generation plan for hospital reconfiguration in Northern Ireland will not be sufficiently evidence-based. SOAS are calling on Minister for Health Mike Nesbitt to again intervene and reschedule the publication of the new Hospital Network reconfiguration plan after appropriate consideration of an evidence-based vision plan for 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:**