

CC/VAW/MC

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22nd April 2024

Ms Violet-Anne Wynne TD,  
Dàil Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2

PQ 15496/24

**To ask the Minister for Health the work being done to manage peak-time ED attendances at UHL; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Violet-Anne Wynne**

Dear Deputy Wynne,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

University Hospital Limerick (UHL) continues to experience extremely high levels of attendances at the Emergency Department (ED).

The latest available data shows that up to the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024, presentations to the ED at UHL increased by 13% on last year and emergency admissions by 10%. This trend is more pronounced still among the over 75s with ED presentations having increased by 15% and emergency admissions by 13%.

During periods of high demand we follow our escalation framework in order to maximise patient flow and create additional capacity to manage the consistently high levels of activity in the hospital. Staff are focused on ensuring that emergency care is first received by the sickest patients.

Ongoing measures include opening surge capacity across all sites; transferring patients on trolleys to our inpatient wards; additional ward rounds by medical teams to expedite discharges or identify patients suitable for transfer to Ennis, Nenagh and St John's Hospitals; and working closely with our colleagues in HSE Mid West Community Healthcare in order to expedite discharges.

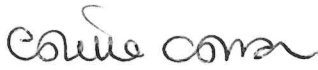
In addition, UL Hospitals Group and HSE Mid West Community Healthcare have developed an integrated unscheduled and emergency care plan for the Mid West region. The first phase of this plan focuses on capitalising on existing pathways.

Over the past year we have increased ED staffing and enhanced alternative care pathways to reduce demand on the department and better facilitate patient flow. These have included but are not limited to the following:

- **ED admission-avoidance for over-75s:** The Geriatric Emergency Medicine (GEM) unit at UHL recently expanded to 9 treatment bays and to 24-hour operations during weekdays. This unit assesses elderly patients in ED with a view to avoiding unnecessary admission to hospital. This unit is open 7 days a week. Data for the first quarter of this year shows of the 617 patients seen, 54% of patients were discharged home, 10% were transferred to a model 2 hospital and 36% were admitted to UHL.
- **Pathfinder:** A collaborative ED-avoidance programme run by the Group's allied health staff and the National Ambulance Service (NAS). Pathfinder aims to deliver safe alternative care at home for over-65s in the Mid West region. Data for the first quarter of this year shows of the 137 patients assessed by the regional Pathfinder team, 64% were supported at home without the need to go to the ED.
- **Alternative Pre-Hospital Pathway:** A new collaboration between UL Hospitals Group and the National Ambulance Service sees definitive care provided in the community by emergency medicine doctors and paramedics to patients who call 999/112. This reduces the number of ambulances bringing patients directly to the ED. Data for the first quarter of this year shows that this service saw 212 patients. Of these, 51% of patients were seen via an alternative care pathway and 49% were conveyed to the ED at UHL.
- **Safer Staffing:** Safer Staffing levels for ED nursing staff have been reviewed and national approval was received to recruit 21.5 WTE additional staff nurses. Recruitment for these posts is now complete with 21.5 staff nurses in post since September 2023. Safer Staffing has also been implemented on medical and surgical wards at UHL.
- **GP and Advanced Nurse Practitioner-on-the-door services** for the ED in an effort to alleviate overcrowding and allow ED staff to treat urgent and emergency patients in a more timely manner which recently commenced.
- The introduction of an **Emergency Medicine Early Warning System** in the ED in January 2024 to improve the recognition of deteriorating patients.
- In the past year, an additional two consultants in emergency medicine have been recruited for the Emergency Department in addition to an extra 20 NCHDs (registrars and SHOs)

I trust this clarifies the position, please contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Colette Cowan**  
Chief Executive Officer  
UL Hospitals Group