

Private & Confidential

22nd January 2025

Deputy Michael Cahill
Dáil Éireann, Leinster House,
Kildare St, Dublin 2

Dear Deputy Cahill,

Ref PQ : **To ask the Minister for Health to urgently address the chronic waiting times, especially for our senior citizens, who have been left waiting on chairs and trolleys for 24, 48 hours and longer in the accident and emergency department at University Hospital Kerry; if he will he addresses as a matter of urgency the chronic shortage of nurses and doctors there (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Michael Cahill**

The above referred Parliamentary Question on various matters at University Hospital Kerry, has been submitted to this office, for response :

Response provided by University Hospital Kerry:

At any given time, varying demand on the Emergency Department [ED] service, impacts upon all those accessing unscheduled care at University Hospital Kerry. In consideration of the ever increasing patient presentations (increase of 15% in past two years), coupled with hospital inpatient and ED structures, it is unfortunately not always viable to immediately facilitate an inpatient bed, for each patient deemed for admission. Notwithstanding this a range of measures have been and continue to be implemented to improve both efficiency, patient flow and egress as well as the patient's experience during their time at the Department -

With specific regard to our patients 75 years and over, the GEMS [Geriatric Emergency Multi-disciplinary Team] is now operational within the Emergency Department, providing a separate allocated area for review of this patient cohort (albeit not pre and post triage). Priority for allocation of Inpatient beds, **is given to patients over 75 years**. At UHK, we also prioritise delirium, those with high 4AT scores [Delirium tool], those with Infection control issues and those who are critically unwell and require clinical prioritisation.

With specific regard to inpatient bed capacity, as we know, demand for urgent unscheduled care is increasing as the population increases and ages. Uniquely, In Kerry our population aged 60 years and over is considerably higher than the national average. To meet with the demands associated to these demographics, management and staff at UHK have long been advocating for an increase in Inpatient capacity and indeed in single occupancy rooms at the hospital. In May 2024, the Government issued the Acute Bed Capacity Expansion Plan 2024-2031 committing additional inpatient beds to the Irish Healthcare System. As per this plan, UHK is set to achieve a total of 108 new beds by 2028. In the interim however, we are currently prioritising development of interim inpatient capacity by reconfiguration of non clinical space (within the hospital's existing footprint) into new ward space. We expect this additional interim bed capacity (approximately 9-beds initially and a further 34 in phases) will be commissioned in UHK during 2025.

Additionally on a daily basis, we augment current UHK bed capacity, for UHK patients, by lease of beds at the Bon Secours Hospital Tralee.

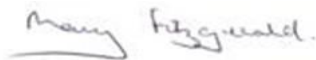
With specific regard to staffing in the UHK Emergency Department, In addition to rostered teams at the ED, an Emergency Department Consultant is on call across 7 days a week. Expansion of the Emergency Department's NCHD team is also well underway. Emergency Department Nursing staff is presently fully staffed in accordance with the Framework for Safe Nurse Staffing.

In an expansion of ED services, the Acute Medical Unit (AMU) is now open on Sat / Sun 9-5 across January and February to see acute medical patients deemed appropriate for this stream – thus alleviating pressure on the main Emergency Department flow.

In a further patient focused initiative, UHK has put in place a Patient Liaison Officer post at the Emergency Department Mon - Friday. This Face to Face point of contact has been found by patients to be extremely helpful a measure which is also reflected in the reduction in ED complaints thus far.

I trust this response is to your satisfaction; should you have any further queries however, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Fitzgerald
General Manager
University Hospital Kerry