

Private & Confidential

16th January 2025

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

Dear Deputy Cahill,

Ref : PQ 46712 To ask the Minister for Health if urgent investment will be made to improve waiting lists and bed accommodation numbers/availability and accident and emergency overcrowding and waiting times at University Hospital Kerry, by providing for additional medical staff at all levels there; 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:

Waiting Lists : Whereas 2024 saw a substantial reduction in existing patients awaiting Out Patient appointment, the simultaneous volume of new referrals in, throughout the year, has grown exponentially (approximately 8%). Thus as at year end 2024, whilst many thousands of patients have been seen, there is a net growth in waiting lists when the volume of new referrals is factored in.

University Hospital Kerry have planned a comprehensive suite of funded Waiting List Initiatives taking place in 2025 to reduce overall numbers on waiting lists and ultimately to reduce the wait time to appointment for each patient. These initiatives will bring about reduced wait times for almost 3,000 patients and will be conducted across the following Out Patient Waiting Lists : Orthopaedics, Rheumatology, Respiratory, Cardiology, Dermatology, General Surgery, Neurology and General Medicine.

Furthermore, we are currently undertaking additional Endoscopy sessions across two weekends each month to address wait times for 550 patients who require various Endoscopy procedures.

Bed Capacity : Demand for all acute services continues to increase in line with population growth and ages. University Hospital Kerry saw an increase in attendances to our ED, of 6% in 2024 and of 15% compared to 2022. You will be aware from recent correspondence that 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.

University Hospital Kerry also augments our day to day bed capacity, for UHK patients, by lease of beds at the Bon Secours Hospital Tralee.

Emergency Department Waits & Staffing

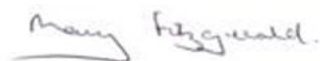
Notwithstanding that attendances to the Emergency Department at UHK have grown significantly over the past two years and continue to do so, through a range of patient focused measures, UHK has successfully reduced the volume of trolley waits by over 25% in 2024 when compared to 2023.

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 prioritise those with delirium, Infection control issues and those who are critically unwell and require clinical prioritization.

Expansion of the Emergency Department's team of medical staff is currently underway. In addition to rostered teams at the ED, an Emergency Department Consultant is non call across 7 days a week. Recruitment processes have commenced in relation to also increasing the Department's NCHD team.

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