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Budget will confirm if government is listening

AS YOU receive this journal we will be about 10 days away from the government's budget statement, detailing income and expenditure targets, for 2015. It is a simple fact that the government's decisions, with regard to the health allocation for 2015, will confirm whether or not the government is listening regarding the crisis in the health service.

In recent weeks we have welcomed comments from Health Minister Leo Varadkar, stating that health must get a supplementary budget to avoid further cuts this year and an adequate budget for 2015. In response, we had conflicting statements, from other ministers including the Taoiseach, that suggest they do not fully understand the extent of the crisis facing patients and staff every day.

This is no longer about whether the health service can do more with less, when we will have universal healthcare or how we will reconcile competing interests. The argument now is whether, after six years of cuts, the health service is fit for purpose, can respond correctly to patient need, and is capable of dealing safely with all those requiring care.

In recent days we've seen confirmation that trolley and ward overcrowding continues to increase, we have had reports of sick patients sitting on the floor, as there were no chairs, let alone trolleys or beds. Yet we have ongoing efforts to make further staffing cuts, in care of the elderly services, regardless of the professional judgement of the director of nursing in charge.

This reality must be accepted by government. It must demonstrate in the 2015 budget that it has listened and understood that the health service cannot do more with less. It must accept, not just because the INMO and patient groups are saying it, but because it is reality, that the health service can no longer look after people in a quality assured way.

The budget must provide the finance to allow the recruitment embargo to be lifted and closed beds to be opened. It must give local nurse managers the autonomy to ensure that all patients/clients are cared for in an environment that provides them with privacy, dignity and a guarantee of safe care provided by nurses, midwives and others who have manageable workloads.

In recent weeks the Patients First cam-



paign – which is aiming to achieve an adequate 2015 health service budget, as a first priority – has formally launched its campaign. At the time of going to press, public meetings had been held in Limerick, Galway, Navan and Dublin and meetings were imminent in Donegal, Cork and another in Dublin.

At these initial meetings, the campaign has already heard from the general public, detailing the experience of their family and friends of the health service. All of the contributions, to date, have acknowledged the untiring efforts of staff but have repeatedly questioned and criticised the environments and the speed of access to the health system. Many politicians have attended these meetings and hopefully have clearly heard the message, not just from the staff in the health service but, most importantly, from those who use the service, that the current situation is simply not good enough.

Now that we have an improving economic situation, it is incumbent on all politicians regardless of political affiliation, to ensure that our health service begins the path to recovery. We have heard much about the levels of taxation and the need, which is correct, to ease the burden on low and middle income households. However, this cannot be done in the absence of ensuring that our health system, which should serve everyone, is properly funded, not over stretched and is capable of providing safe care in a dignified environment.

The government must now decide its priorities and our Patients First campaign is clearly showing them the way.

Liam Doran
 General Secretary, INMO