



Budget cuts focus

INMO concerns about health budget cuts were among the issues covered by the media in recent weeks, **Ann Keating** reports

'NURSES urge Minister to halt cuts or wreak havoc' was a headline in the *Irish Examiner* (November 7). "Nurses have urged Health Minister James Reilly not to force through yet more budget cutbacks, warning the policy 'is threatening patient safety and creating unacceptable delays in cancer treatment.'"

Speaking after the chief executives of four major hospitals wrote to the HSE making a similar plea, the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation said further cuts will cause havoc to an already damaged system. The union said that since the recession began the health budget has been cut by €3.3 billion, staff numbers have fallen by 10,000 and more than 2,000 beds shut.

And noting that further cuts of €666m will be imposed next year, INMO general secretary, Liam Doran, warned the service cannot take any more cuts. He said: "The letter from the chief executives of the Mater, St James's, Tallaght and Crumlin confirms what this Organisation has been saying for a number of years.

"Further cuts to the health service are unsustainable. Patient care will be compromised and safe practice will be impossible. It is time for this government to listen to those working in the frontline, invest in our health services and provide safe care for the most vulnerable people in our society."

HSE service plan

The *Irish Daily Mirror* (November 26) ran a headline – **'HSE leaves €1bn budget cuts plan to last minute'**. "Health bosses left it to the very last minute to hand in their service plan outlining €1 billion in cuts. The Health Service Executive had until midnight last night to give it to Health Minister James Reilly.

"When contacted at 6pm yesterday, a spokesperson for the Minister said the plan had not been received but would be by midnight. The plan was overseen by officials from the Department of the Taoiseach and the Public Expenditure Minister.

"Liam Doran of the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation said the HSE had been given an impossible task by the government. He added: 'In fairness to the HSE, the government has shrugged its shoulders and said 'make savings' of €666 million. The government had choices to make. It could have placed tax on sugar sweetened drinks. It could have gone harder on smoking and alcohol.

'It chose to do nothing and now hits frontline services. It is unrealistic and unfair. This will be the fifth battering the HSE budget has taken and will hit services and patients.'

Mr Doran claimed the devil would be in the detail. He said: "behind every cut is a silent piece of misery. There is no political understanding about the impact of this. Minister Reilly has some understanding but his friends around the Cabinet table have no idea."

Breast screening

The Cork News (November 8) reported on an INMO press release about breast screening under a headline – **Breastcheck expansion 'would save lives'**.

"There are calls for the Breastcheck screening programme to be rolled out to all women over 40 across the country. The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) has said a nationwide expansion of their Pink Power initiative, which provided members with access to a free breast examination and educational advice with follow up care if required in 18 centres across the country, has the 'potential to save lives'.

"INMO president Claire Mahon believes the nationwide expansion of this initiative could mean earlier identification, diagnosis and commencement of treatment for women. Along with the immediate expansion of the Breastcheck programme to include all women over 40 years of age, the INMO is also seeking a major education programme to encourage women to carry out self-examination on a regular

basis, and to seek further advice if they are concerned... Ms Mahon stated the initial costs of such an initiative are 'easily countered' by the savings, arising from early diagnosis, which will accrue in the medium to longer term."

Emigration

120 nurses a month are looking for work abroad – according to a headline in the *Irish Daily Mail* (November 4). "Up to 120 nurses and midwives are applying to leave Ireland to work abroad every month, new figures indicate.

"The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland revealed that 1,231 registered nurses sought certificates to work abroad in the first ten months of this year. That's on top of the estimated 5,000 nurses who left Ireland between 2009 and 2012.

"The INMO described the figures as extremely worrying and warned the 'brain drain' would intensify as 1,500 new graduates searched for work. INMO general secretary, Liam Doran, described the exodus as 'bizarre and unforgivable'. He added that the figures indicated that 50 new graduates a week sought papers to work abroad and that each nurse and midwife leaving cost between €75,000 and 80,000 to train over their four-year degree.

"The documents were sought by the nurses and midwives for regulatory authorities in 16 countries. The majority – 685 – were issued to the UK with a further 550 destined for Australia.

"Mr Doran said the only options in Ireland for recently qualified nurses were agency work or the controversial new nurse graduate scheme... There are 600,000 nurses working across public and private sector in the UK and our 1,500 new graduates a year can be easily absorbed there. We are going to be asking ourselves in five years' time, where are all our nurses gone?

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