



Health system in crisis

The Patients First campaign got off to a good start in a month that highlighted the hospital overcrowding crisis. Ann Keating reports

A BUSY month again for the Organisation in the media with the launch of the Patients First campaign, the protest at UHG, shortage of nurses in Kerry General Hospital and the ongoing trolley crisis.

Patients First Campaign

The Irish Examiner (September 16) gave space to the launch of the Patients First campaign under a headline – **Health system 'is in crisis and needs surgery'**. "Ireland's health system is in crisis and requires immediate surgery, according to a new group undertaking a nationwide campaign demanding that patients have more of a say in the system. Patients First is comprised of existing groups such as the Irish Patients Association, Cystic Fibrosis Ireland, and Patient Opinion, and will hold a string of public regional meetings... Stephen McMahon of the Irish Patients Association, who is leading Patients First, said public patients were waiting for lengthy periods to get an appointment with consultants and MRI scans at a time when there was "no accountability" for how much of the health budget is spent.

While Mr McMahon said the campaign was about more than calling for additional resources, Dr John Duddy of the Irish Medical Organisation said... the pendulum had now swung from doing "more with less" to doing "less with less". Mr McMahon has called for "an honest", truthful budget", next month. He said "the meetings were just the start of the campaign, one which will lead right up to the next general election."

INMO President, Claire Mahon was quoted in the *Irish Daily Mail* under a headline – **We can't keep doing more with less** – "When I meet with nurses and midwives on a daily basis, they genuinely feel we are on a collision course. We really want to avoid a drastic situation here."

The Irish Times (September 16) also carried the story – **New group to campaign**

against health cuts. "Patients, doctors and nurses have joined forces to campaign against cuts to the health services in the forthcoming budget... Launching the Patients First campaign yesterday, Stephen McMahon of the Irish Patients' Association said it aimed to "give a voice to the voiceless" using the State's health services. The main demand of the campaign is for the budget to protect health services and patient care. The groups are also seeking a mechanism for patients and their families to share their experiences of the health system and to engage with healthcare providers.

"Ninety per cent of users were happy with the system, said Dr Hilary Dunne of Patient Opinion, but those with stories to tell were not being encouraged to voice their experiences. There has been a consistent failure in the health system to learn from experiences and we need to change that." The group is also seeking legislation to require hospitals to display staffing levels."

Protest at UHG

The *Connacht Tribune* (September 19) gave several column inches to our members' protest regarding overcrowding at Galway University Hospital – **Nurses on hospital hell.** Members of the INMO said: "it was impossible to give optimum patient care while up to 90 patients on average were waiting for admission to the twelve cubicles in the emergency department at University Hospital Galway (UHG)." IRO Clare Treacy said that "the overcrowding at UHG was 'unprecedented' in recent weeks and led to fears among staff members over what lay ahead during the winter months. Ms Treacy has called for an independent report to be carried out by medical professionals in relation to waiting times at the ED. She pointed out that UHG serves a population of 700,000 people in a region which

stretches as far north as Co Donegal... There are only two resuscitation rooms, nine cubicles for major issues and three cubicles for minor issues in the biggest emergency department in the West of Ireland. On an average shift, nurses can have up to 80 or 90 patients registered and waiting to be seen at any one time." She said: "Confidentiality is virtually impossible and it's just not an appropriate place to have that mixture of patients... What was once considered abnormal is now normal and our protest was organised out of frustration. There are issues relating to burn-out, stress, and the turnover of staff. What the nurses want now is a proper, full review of the ED."

Trolley watch increase

The Irish Independent (September 13) ran a headline – **Hospital trolley misery worsened last month.** "The rise of 19%, highlighted in a report from the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation shows the increasing pressure on hospitals as more patients look for treatment even before the autumn and winter influx... Liam Doran said: "The figures are a clear warning that our health service has already cut back too deeply."

Kerry General Hospital

Shortage of nurses has made hospital unsafe was a headline in *The Kerryman* (September 3). "The shortage of nurses at Kerry General Hospital has reached "crisis point" according to the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, who claim the lack of nursing staff has made the county's only main acute hospital "unsafe". IRO Michael Dineen said "the problem has arisen because of the on-going recruitment moratorium within the HSE." He said "that 10 additional beds have opened in the hospital without sufficient additional staff being made available."

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