

Sinn Féin Health Solutions | Réitigh Shláinte Shinn Féin

ADDRESSING CAPACITY

Ending the chaos in accident and emergency

AG DUL I NGLEIC LE HACMHAINN

An tAnord i Rannóga Timpistí agus Éigeandála a thabhairt chun deiridh



**END THE CHAOS
IN HEALTH**

Introduction

Réamhrá

On 3 January 2017, 612 patients were left waiting on trolleys, the highest ever recorded number of patients on trolleys in the state. For the first six months of this year 51,321 patients were forced to spend a night or more on a trolley throughout the hospitals in the state.

This represented the worst ever recorded number since the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) started collating such figures.

These are not just statistics, they are human beings. They are grandparents, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters.

When it comes to the trolley crisis in our hospitals the problem is multifaceted. However, it incorporates four main issues which need to be immediately addressed, recruitment and retention of staff, reopening closed beds, adequate step down facilities and home care packages, and proper primary and community care.

Sinn Féin believes that if these issues are tackled with an intelligent, coherent, and progressive plan, in conjunction with the necessary political will, then the trolley crises can be significantly addressed.

Capacity - beds

Acmhainn - leapacha

Since the crises and subsequent austerity years hundreds of beds were lost in hospitals throughout the state due to cuts to the health budget.

The short-termism of closing beds has resulted in longer term problems such as the trolley crisis, which in itself leads to worse mortality outcomes. Indeed, the Irish Association for Emergency Medicine warned earlier this year that up to 350 people may be dying each year as a direct result of the overcrowding of the country's Emergency Departments.

Sinn Féin proposes to immediately increase bed numbers by 500 and reopen all closed beds. This is feasible given that there would be no increase in capital expenditure costs as the beds are already there - they are just not being used.

This measure would immediately take pressure off emergency departments as patients could be admitted to a hospital bed instead of being left on a trolley because there is not space to admit them.

Additionally, we would ensure the Emergency Department Taskforce works on a permanent basis monitoring the situation nationwide and report on possible problems down the line which could be proactively tackled.

However, it is both pointless and impossible to increase the number of beds without the healthcare professionals to staff them.

Recruitment and retention of staff

Foireann a earcú agus a choinneáil

As has been noted the trolley crisis exists because of a lack of capacity in our health service. Part of the lack of capacity is derived from the closure of acute beds in our hospitals due to a lack of healthcare staff. To reverse the massive cutbacks made to staffing levels in our health service firstly we need to invest in recruiting more staff to the health service and also address key issues for existing and prospective staff, such as working conditions, facilities, supports, and training opportunities.

Sinn Féin would increase nursing numbers by an additional 500 nurses and midwives each and every year over a five-year term, bringing the five year total to 2,500, which would be followed by further recruitment. Sinn Féin supports pay equalisation for new entrant nurses and therefore we would look to establish a new "nursing commission" to deal with the issue of nurses pay and conditions.

In addition we would recruit 800 more consultants plus medical secretaries over five years to work in hospitals across the state. We would also renegotiate the Consultants Contract, with progressive provisions to include protected time for teaching and facilities for research and academic collaborations.

In addition, we would address key issues as identified by staff, such as working conditions, facilities, supports, and training opportunities, which would in turn help make the working environment more pleasant and therefore help as regards the retention of existing staff.

Adequate step down facilities & Home Help

Áiseanna íoschéimneach cuí agus cúnamh baile

Immediate action is required to ensure that people can access appropriate care and return home from hospital as soon as they are fit to do so.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of adequate step-down facilities, home care packages, and home help some patients, oftentimes elderly people, remain in hospital even though they could be discharged.

In order to ensure that patients who can be discharged are discharged we would increase nursing home beds to cater for people who cannot care for themselves, or be cared for, in their own home. In conjunction with this we would also seek to increase home help hours and homecare packages by 30 per cent over three years with a continuous investment in home help hour's year on year, as well as increasing respite care service provision for older people by 20%.

These measures would go some way to freeing up acute hospital beds and allow patients who have been admitted to the Emergency Department to be given a hospital bed.

Primary and community care

Cúram príomha agus pobail

Adequately resourced, both financial and human, primary and community care can play a huge role in relieving the pressure on hospitals.

Improved access to GP and other services in the community is proven to reduce the burden on hospitals, particularly if there is an increased focus on preventative care.

Strong and effective primary care is fundamental to overall health system performance and delivers improved public health and shifts more towards disease prevention and early intervention, alongside the traditional 'diagnose and treat' model.

Therefore, Sinn Féin would refocus our health service towards primary care first in order to alleviate the pressure on secondary care. This would be done through the recruitment of more GPs and support staff.

We would introduce new salaried GPs to broaden the attractiveness of General Practice as a career choice by introducing 200 salaried GP posts over five years as well as the recruitment of an additional 200 practice nurses and medical secretaries to work alongside the salaried GPs.

Such a measure would prioritise rural areas that are struggling to attract GPs and urban areas where services are overstretched in the deployment of the new salaried posts, thus, ensuring a move towards disease prevention and early intervention and moving away from the Emergency Department being the first port of call for patients and reducing pressure on hospitals and the staff operating in them.

Conclusion

Conclúid

Sinn Féin believes that if the issues causing the trolley crisis, as outlined by those working in the health service, are tackled with an intelligent, coherent, and progressive plan in conjunction with the necessary political will, then the trolley crises can be significantly addressed.

As outlined above, if we tackle the four main issues of - capacity through opening beds, recruitment and retention of staff, adequate step down facilities and home care packages, and proper primary and community care, then we will make huge inroads to ameliorating the trolley crisis, save lives, improve the lives of patients and their families, and improve the working environment for healthcare staff.

Beyond the trolley crisis, we are keenly aware that there are a vast number of strands to the overall crisis in the health service which need to be immediately tackled. Our Health Policy – Better4Health – outlines costed policies which would radically change the direction of our health service and work towards an Irish National Health Service where the services you need are available free at the point of delivery and when you need them.