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2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022

Mr. Sean Egan,  
Director of Healthcare Regulation  
Health Information & Quality Authority  
Dublin Regional Office,  
George's Court,  
George's Lane,  
Dublin 7

**Re: Severe ED Crowding at University Hospital Limerick, and service capacity in the Midwest**

Dear Sean,

I refer to your correspondence dated 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2022 regarding University Hospital Limerick. I also acknowledge, and per our discussion on 1<sup>st</sup> March, our shared concerns with regard to the ongoing challenges being experienced at the Emergency Department, University Hospital Limerick (ED, UHL). I am providing you with this interim response pending a further more detailed reply in the coming weeks in the context of significant work ongoing at UHL.

I understand the key focus areas of the recent HIQA unannounced risk based inspection included; patient flow; bed capacity; staffing levels and the respect, dignity and privacy for people receiving care in the ED. At the time of inspection, I am also aware that HIQA issued a compliance plan in relation to adverse findings pertaining to overcrowding and chronic nursing shortages in the ED. HSE Acute and Community Operations along with UL Hospital Group are working with UHL to support implementation of the compliance plan as quickly as possible and to progress a range of initiatives to improve patient experience, support alternative pathways including hospital avoidance and improve patient flow. The HSE is supportive of reviewing any additional manpower requirements including the requirement to strengthen 24/7 operational management on site at UHL.

You may also be aware that at the request of the Minister, a HSE Support Team has been commissioned by me to undertake an overall review of unscheduled care within the ULHG. In this regard, the HSE Support Team will focus on the Five Fundamentals of Unscheduled Care Framework including:

- Leadership, Culture and Governance
- Patient Flow Pre Admission
- Patient Flow Post Admission
- Integrated Community and Hospital Services
- Using Information to Measure and Monitor Performance Improvement

The Team had an initial dialogue with the Hospital Group and CHO 3 on May 13<sup>th</sup> and will spend two days on site at UHL (June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022) to review the day to day functioning within a leadership, management, operational and clinical context. The primary focus will be on determining purposeful and integrated actions aimed at delivering sustained improvements and cognisant of work underway in relation to the HIQA compliance plan. This work will also include key proposals and recommendations for community enhancements to support an integrated approach for effective patient flow.

I would welcome an opportunity to comprehensively apprise you on the work of the Support Team in due course.

In relation to acute bed capacity and notwithstanding the significant additional beds funded and opened in Limerick as part of NSP 2021 and Winter Plan 2021, it is accepted that further additional acute bed capacity is required to meet demographic demand. This is in addition to the 96 bed-block as detailed below and consideration is currently ongoing in terms of the most appropriate solution(s) for additional bed capacity requirements.

With regard to capacity and the 96 bed-block capital project planned for University Hospital Limerick, when completed, it will deliver four new 24 bed wards (all single inpatient rooms). This is intended to be an equal mix of additional capacity and replacement bed capacity to enable a reduction of beds in old nightingale ward accommodation in the hospital. The project represents an overall capital investment in the order of €93.5 million.

As of today, I can confirm the following:

- Tenders for the construction works were received in early February 2022 and the tender evaluation process was subsequently completed.
- The HSE Board approval for an award of contract to the successful contractor was granted at the March 2022 HSE Board meeting.
- There is a process of engagement currently ongoing with the successful contractor for the 96 bed block.
- Subject to concluding an award of contract in the coming period the intention would be that works could then commence on site by October 2022.
- The building works are anticipated to take approximately 24 months and would therefore be due for completion in October 2024.
- The new block would then need to be equipped and commissioned for use in Q4 2024 prior to going into operation.

It is important to note that there are a number of additional challenges arising for the construction industry sector in general in respect of delivery of capital projects in light of current market conditions such as supply chain and material price change issues.

In addition, the HSE is currently developing immediate unscheduled care integrated improvement plans and in tandem developing an overall integrated 3 Year Unscheduled Care Plan for submission to the Minister. It is envisaged that a number of new initiatives will be brought forward to improve patient experience, support patient flow, and improve access to diagnostics and community interventions.

In summary, the HSE is actively working with University of Limerick Hospital Group and the Community Health Organisation 3 to develop and implement immediate, medium and longer term plans to improve patient experience and effect overall unscheduled care improvement at UL.

While I note the HIQA report is due for publication shortly, in light of the work ongoing, I would welcome an opportunity to meet with you in the coming weeks to discuss progress and plans to address the risks and concerns experienced at UL. In the meantime, the challenges being experienced at the University Hospital Limerick will continue to be assessed, supported and addressed.

I trust this is acceptable and I look forward to hearing from you in this regard.

Yours sincerely,



Anne O'Connor  
Chief Operations Officer