

# Public meeting on future of hospital tonight (Thursday)

Roscommon Hospital Action Committee will hold a public meeting in the Abbey Hotel on Thursday June 3rd next at 8.30 p.m. to discuss the threat to services at the hospital.

"Never has there been such serious threats to the future of services at the Hospital," the Roscommon Hospital Action Committee stated this week.

Speaking to Roscommon People this week, Roscommon Hospital Action Committee stated the hospital may be reduced to an 8 am to 8 pm A&E service if the shortage of junior doctors from July is not tackled.

"Although we had guarantees about the future of services at the hospital, these events could overturn the guarantees and leave our services threatened," Una Ní Chunn, PRO of the HAC stated. "But this is not a fait accompli, the people of Roscommon can send a message to the Health Service Executive and Government that we will not stand for our services

being reduced.

"If our A&E service is reduced it will shake the public confidence in the hospital. Like Monaghan before us if we lose 24 hour a day, seven day a week cover, it will be extremely difficult to reinstate it. Therefore the people of Roscommon have to prevent a reduction to our hospital services now.

"A super manager based in Galway that will manage UCHG, Portiuncula and Roscommon Hospitals has been appointed and the Roscommon Hospital Action Committee is concerned about this," Cllr. McNamara stated. If managers in Galway end up making all the decisions for Roscommon Hospital then we will end up at the beck and call of Galway not being able to respond to our local needs.

"While it is anticipated that some services will continue at Roscommon Hospital into the future more and more people will be expected to travel to Galway for services. The overcrowded UCHG and

the difficulty in even finding parking at UCHG will add greatly to people's stress accessing treatment.

"Roscommon Hospital cannot be left as a 'glorified nursing home' with minor clinics. We need an acute hospital able to deal with emergencies, surgery and medical conditions into the future. The people of Roscommon have always supported the retention of services at the Hospital and the Hospital Action Committee are again calling on you to come out once again to make sure that the Health Service Executive and the Government know that we will not be treated as second class citizens travelling the length and breadth of the county getting medical and surgical treatment when we have an excellent hospital on our door step.

"If you feel it is important to save services at Roscommon Hospital then come along to the Abbey Hotel on Thursday night June 3rd and have your say. We need to act now, if the services are removed it will be too late."



Roscommon County Hospital.

## Hospital raised at FF gathering

The issue of the future of Roscommon County Hospital was raised by Cllr. Orla Leyden at the recent Fianna Fáil Midlands Regional Conference.

The conference, which covered counties Westmeath, Longford, Roscommon, Laois and Offaly, was held at the Hudson Bay Hotel on Saturday 29th May. Cllr. Orla Leyden in a question to Taoiseach Brian Cowen asked about the future of Roscommon County Hospital and fears that issues regarding junior doctor recruitment may pose a threat to 24/7 Accident and Emergency cover at Roscommon County Hospital from July.

Cllr. Leyden acknowledged the Taoiseach's support for Roscommon County Hospital in the past as Minister for Health and Minister for Finance, which resulted in the new A & E unit and other major developments in recent years at the hospital.

She added that Roscommon County Hospital is an excellent hospital of vital importance to the people of County Roscommon and that its future is the most critical issue in the county at present. Cllr. Leyden said to the Taoiseach in front of the FF gathering at the Midland Regional conference, that she is not prepared to stand idly by and let Roscommon

County Hospital be downgraded by stealth or otherwise.

She clearly asked the Taoiseach Brian Cowen TD to intervene now on this crucial matter. She added that it was wrong that the HSE and an independent cabinet member Minister Mary Harney are making critical decisions on the health of our region in what is a FF-led Government.

Following the question and answers session Cllr. Leyden had a private discussion with the Taoiseach and according to Cllr. Leyden, the Taoiseach listened to her concerns and committed to giving this matter his personal attention.

# Finneran hospital reply 'a load of rubbish'

A reply given by local Minister for Housing and Local Services in the Dáil in relation to Roscommon County Hospital was branded "a load of rubbish" by Deputy Denis Naughten.

Speaking in a Dáil debate on Thursday last, Deputy Denis Naughten asked about the plans for emergency, acute and maternity services at Roscommon Hospital and Portiuncula Hospital, County Galway.

"The HSE is using the shortage of non-consultant hospital doctors and the introduction of the EU working time directive as a means of downgrading services at Portiuncula and Roscommon hospitals. This staffing issue is threatening the operation of the accident and emergency departments at both hospitals, which currently operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The overnight downgrading of these hospital services, without planning, will result in the loss of life locally. Foreign non-consultant hospital doctors are not coming to Ireland for a number of reasons. Red tape and the short du-

ration of visas represent a major part of the problem. This is not something that has happened overnight. It is only now, at the 11th hour, that the Government has started to discuss the issue and to try to resolve the problem. It did not become a priority for the Government until it started to realise not only that it will affect the smaller hospitals, as secretly planned, but also that it will threaten the operation of the major regional centres. This is a deliberate act of national sabotage," said Deputy Naughten.

"The people of Roscommon were told by the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Finneran, that they either use or lose their hospital yet no funds have been provided to upgrade the sterilisation facilities could be performed in the hospital. In the past four years not one patient has been put through Roscommon County Hospital under the National Treatment Purchase Fund even though the hospital has the capacity and no waiting lists.

"Roscommon was promised additional out-



Minister Michael Finneran



Deputy Denis Naughten

patient clinics. Instead, the HSE has reduced the number of clinics that take place at the hospital. On 23 April, at a meeting with local public representatives in Portiuncula Hospital, HSE management informed them the super manager would not be appointed until the end of the year at the earliest. Yet, less than a month later, the HSE made an announcement of an appointment without any notice. I understand the individual in question is a consultant radiologist, Mr. David O'Keeffe, based in UCHG. His appointment will cover six acute hospitals, community services

Minister Mary Harney.

"The Government is committed to ensuring the delivery and maintenance of the best quality health service possible and in providing the highest standard of patient care in an effective and efficient way with the resources allocated. Roscommon and Portiuncula hospitals play an important part in the HSE West network of acute hospitals and provide a range of acute, diagnostic and support services to both adults and children in their catchment areas which include east Galway, Roscommon, north Tipperary, Offaly and Westmeath.

"The HSE has been working in recent years to enhance collaboration between UCHG, Portiuncula and Roscommon hospitals in the provision of services. This is occurring, for example, in the reconfiguration of the surgical and anaesthetic departments of Portiuncula and Roscommon hospitals into a joint department of surgery and anaesthesia. In addition the HSE, in line with the commitment in its national service plan for 2010, has commenced the proc-

ess of preparing a plan for the future configuration of acute hospital services in the HSE West as a whole. A process of dialogue with the hospitals, staff and other interests has begun and will continue to be conducted on a consultative and inclusive basis in the interests of ensuring safe, effective and sustainable services in the years ahead.

"The HSE plans to recruit a manager with responsibility for UCHG, Portiuncula Hospital and Roscommon County Hospital. This initiative involves the expansion of the current post of manager at Galway and is designed to promote good co-ordination of service delivery. The purpose of this is simply to improve management processes and thereby improve services for patients. This planned appointment is also in line with the approach on the governance of acute hospitals recommended in the Health Information and Quality Authority's 2009 report on quality and safety of services at the mid-western regional hospital Ennis. This report identified integrated governance

across hospital networks as an important factor in ensuring higher quality services for patients.

"The current position on this matter is that the public competition conducted by the Public Appointments Service did not result in the selection of a successful candidate. The HSE is, therefore, considering further options in order to provide for this key appointment and hopes to be in a position to make an announcement presently.

"The Minister is satisfied the plan to recruit a manager with responsibility for the hospitals will enhance the capacity for collaboration in service provision, provide a more strategic approach to the management of the hospitals concerned and ensure the provision of better and safer services to the people of the region. Both Roscommon and Portiuncula hospitals will continue to play key roles in the provision of hospital services to the population of the west."

Deputy Denis Naughten replied, "With all due respect to the Minister of State, that reply was a load of rubbish."