

Straight talking



with 'The Duke'

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Biggest ever threat to Roscommon Hospital

Watching The Frontline programme on Monday night and listening to what has been said on the national airwaves and in the papers in recent weeks, I am more convinced than ever that we created an uncontrollable monster when we created the HSE. It is now a runaway train that will be very hard to stop.

The plight of carers was always well known, but it seems to be getting even worse now as the cutbacks in areas like respite and home care kick in and it is going to get much worse as the cutbacks become more severe as the years go on.

There are a number of quite incredible stories on the go at the moment. Firstly we have the unbelievable tale of the murdered teenager Daniel McAnaspie and what happened with him. In the aftermath of his savage murder it has emerged that the HSE do not know how many young people have died in the care of the state over the past ten years or so. If it wasn't so serious it would have been comical to see the minister responsible on the TV on Monday night saying that he hadn't a clue either and that the HSE would not give him the information he required and he is the minister!

Now we have a situation whereby the government is going to have to introduce legislation to compel another branch of a state to hand over information! It is beyond a joke.

Then we have the situation in Loughley House in Athlone. It is run by the HSE itself but along comes another branch of the same organisation, HIQA and now the facility



Minister Michael Finneran.

is going to be closed to the anger of the relatives of those being cared for there.

However locally the savage cuts that are now being implemented represent the biggest threat to the County Hospital in Roscommon since the first threat emerged decades ago.

I know that there have been a lot of false dawns and unnecessary scares about the hospital over the years and in fairness politicians of all colours and parties of all have fought ever so hard to maintain services at the hospital over the years.

The Hospital Action Committee has also done a marvellous job over the years and its history is well known too, but I am convinced now that the threat to the future of the hospital is now bigger than it ever was. The HSE can now seriously run down services at the hospital under the excuse that they have no money to run it and the people of Roscommon have to be very, very careful that they do not allow that

to happen. This is not the fault of Michael Finneran or Denis Naughten or Frank Feighan. All three TDs, and all the TDs who were there before them, want the hospital to stay open. It would be political suicide to have it any other way. What I always maintained was that by far the most important service at Roscommon County Hospital is 24 hour A&E cover but that is now under threat.

I don't have to spell it out what the removal of 24 hour A&E cover would do to the people of this county. If that cover were to go what would happen if an elderly person gets a heart attack or a stroke or if there is a serious car accident as there has been several times in recent years? If 24 hour A&E goes then it will sound the death knell for Roscommon hospital and that is the reality.

The HSE will say that they have no plans to downgrade the hospital but it will happen by stealth. The HSE have imposed a ban on the recruitment of junior doctors.

That means that there will be a shortage very soon, if not already, and then there will not be the staff to keep A&E open for 24 hours. When that happens – and it will happen soon – then the hospital will be downgraded and there will not be a word about it.

Over the past few weeks we have seen huge public marches in Tipperary, Wexford and Athlone with people worried about the loss or closure of hospital services.

I'm afraid that Roscommon County Hospital now falls into that category.

More daft Green proposals

The well meaning but daft Greens are at it again. This week it emerged that while John Gormley is planning to hit everyone in the country with water charges in the next two years, hundreds of millions of euro is outstanding from business all over the country to local authorities.

If the councils cannot collect the business charges then they will certainly not be able to collect the domestic bills outstanding. In Roscommon the County Council here have collected 49% of the

money owed to it in water charges, which leaves 51% that it has not collected. There is not much point in asking people to pay water charges if the majority can get away scot free without paying anything at all. Unless the department of the environment can come up with a better way of collecting these water charges then they are wasting their time.

Then we had the totally stupid entry by Eamonn Ryan into the debate about rugby games on pay TV. I am on the record here

in this column and elsewhere as hating having to pay to watch sport on TV. However, there is a commercial reality, especially in international sports like rugby and if Mr Ryan goes ahead with his proposals it will have very detrimental affect on the game in this country. It would mean that Ireland would be competing with countries like Wales and Scotland and Italy, never mind France and England, who would be taking Heineken Cup money in from TV.

The IRFU has run a good ship here over the last ten years or so and the TV money has meant that they were able to pay their Irish players to stay at home. If that TV money is lost then all the top Irish players will end up in France and England and the likes of Munster and Leinster will be left behind. Remember too that Irish rugby has been so successful over the past ten years and that is largely due to the money the game earned from TV.

I know that The Greens are well intentioned and they try to be genuine but, please give us a break lads! No more daft populist ideas.

Sickening moralising over Keating marriage

The fascination with the break up of Ronan Keating's marriage is typical of the way media coverage has gone in recent years. The coverage given to this story in the national media has been way over the top. Marriages break up all the time and it is very sad for those involved but the moralising that is going in the national media on this issue is sickening.

People in glasshouses ... is what I say. The couple should be left alone to either make up or break up.

No comment

A good friend of mine suggested on Sunday night that I should comment on the interview given by Mary O'Rourke to Ryan Tubridy on The Late Late Show last week. I would rather not comment on the interview really. There are laws governing what I might say about it!