

HAC calls public meeting amid A&E downgrading fears

'Hospital at crisis point'

■ Paul Healy

Roscommon Hospital is under its greatest threat for thirty years – that's according to the Roscommon Hospital Action Committee, who have organised a public meeting to address a growing sense of crisis about the facility.

HAC councillors Paula McNamara and Valerie Byrne and the group's chairperson, John McDermott, contacted the Roscommon People office this week to express their "deep alarm" at recent developments.

They say that the anticipated shortage of junior doctors from July 2010 could result in the current 24-hour A&E services in Roscommon being reduced to an 8 am to 8 pm service – and they have also expressed concern at the appointment of a 'super-manager' who will oversee University College Hospital in Galway, Roscommon and Portlinculla Hospitals.

Mr. John McDermott, chairperson of the HAC, said that the new 'super-manager' will have to address a deficit of about €22m in Galway – and accordingly, services in Roscommon and Ballinasloe will suffer.

"The reconfiguration of services being spoken about is simply the Hanly Report by another name" he said. "They will withdraw services in Roscommon and Portlinculla and centralise them in Galway. But Galway is already over-crowded and based on many surveys it could be categorised as the worst hospital in the country. We believe that all acute services will go to Galway."

HAC Cllr. Paula McNamara said that people will die in Co. Roscommon if the A&E services are restricted. "As far as I can see it's 'curtains' for Roscommon Hospital at this point in time. It has never been as serious as it is now. The public must come out and voice their opposition to what is happening."

Her HAC colleague, Cllr. Valerie Byrne, said that Government policy is being implemented and that the consequences will be disastrous for Roscommon. "We are absolutely at crisis point. You have a staff embargo in place across the country, and a resulting shortage of staff in every hospital. You have people working in bad conditions due to lack of staff and lack of equipment."

The HAC are hosting a public meeting in the Abbey Hotel, Roscommon on Thursday, June 3rd next (8.30 pm).

Group chairperson John McDermott said: "We have fought this campaign for thirty years and we will keep fighting. But we need the public to come out and tell us what they want us to do."

Fine Gael Deputy Denis Naughten has also raised concerns about the threat to A&E in recent weeks.

Meanwhile, in a statement, the HSE said that it is "too early to say" what hospital services locally might be affected arising from the shortage of junior doctors.

"The HSE is aware of the shortage of junior doctors (NCHDs) that exists in some parts of the



Councillor Paula McNamara.



Councillor Valerie Byrne.

country and of the anticipated increase in this shortage that may occur in some areas from 1st July.

"A recruitment drive for a new intake of Not-Consultant Hospital Doctors is underway and a number of initiatives are being considered to specifically address the situation to ensure that hospital EDs (emergency departments) continue to offer a high level of care to all patients. Given that this recruitment process is still ongoing and its outcome as yet unknown, it is too early to say which hospitals and what parts of the country might be affected and to what degree."

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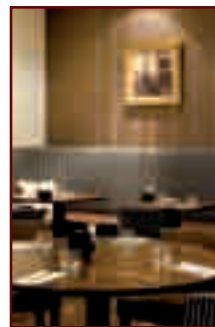
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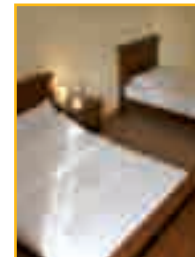
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