

CT scanner at UHW will be operational by November



A CT scanner, similar to the pictured model, shall be operational at UHW by November.

Independent TD John Halligan has welcomed assurances that a new €1.75 million CT scanner which has been lying idle at University Hospital Waterford (UHW) for several months will be operational by November.

The scanner was funded through a donation from the Waterford City and County Infirmary Trust late last year and was launched by then Health Minister James Reilly last May.

However, Deputy Halligan told the Dáil on Wednesday last that the scanner – which patient groups say is absolutely critical for stroke patients – is “gathering dust” because there aren’t enough trained radiographers to operate it.

“There have been constant delays in getting this machine operational, first because there wasn’t sufficient support staff and then because of the failure of the HSE to train diagnostic staff”, Deputy Halligan said.

“On several occasions, diagnostic training sessions for radiographers at the hospital have been cancelled because of understaffing. The radiographers could not be released from the roster because it would have created a crisis in the department.

“It was anticipated that the development of this second CT unit at Waterford would provide improved access to patients for CT diagnostic services and its location, adjacent to the new Emergency Department (ED), would provide more immediate and safer access to CT for critically ill patients, as well as supporting the implementation of stroke protocols for patients presenting to the emergency department.

“However patients requiring CT scans are still being brought to the older machine in the hospital, which is located two floors away, in the basement. Extra staff are required to take a patient that distance, in case anything happens on the way. A total of 7,014 CT scans were completed at the hospital last year, which is a large volume of traffic making its way through the hospital to the basement unnecessarily.”

Deputy Halligan welcomed an assurance from Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald that the CT scanner would be in operation by November.

“Radiographers at Waterford have long warned that they cannot work safely with their present numbers,” he said.

“We now have a situation where patients are undergoing urgent MRI scans at private hospitals following referral from South Tipperary General Hospital (STGH), due to insufficient capacity at Waterford. The weekly slot for MRI access for South Tipperary patients in Waterford was restricted to two sessions a week earlier this year, because of the high volume of patients at the Emergency Department in Waterford.

Deputy Halligan concluded: “Government TDs have gone to great lengths to give assurances to the people of Waterford that there would be no downgrading of services when the hospital was grouped with University Hospital Cork.

“The situation within the radiography department is just one example where this is not the case.”