

FEAR FOR ST PATRICK'S

HSE downplays concerns over Hospital's future

The HSE has attempted to downplay fears that Saint Patrick's Hospital on John's Hill could be facing sanctions and possible closure this year if it fails to meet numerous standards set by health watchdog HIQA by July.

A report undertaken over two days last January by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) identified areas of "major" non-compliance at the 96-bed community hospital under infrastructural standards.

Of particular concern was the "predominantly institutional" 1950s-style dormitory accommodation being inadequate to ensure that residents' 'privacy and dignity was met on a daily basis' due to limited space between beds.

Inspectors formed the view that there were inadequate storage facilities available for residents' personal belongings in the wards, to the effect that residents could only display minimal personal effects.

Concern was also expressed about the overall design and layout of wards, with inadequate private areas apart from bedrooms to receive visitors, insufficient space for residents to spend quiet time alone and inadequate storage space.

However the inspectors noted the efforts made to create an atmosphere of comfort throughout the hospital, with the privacy of residents respected as much as possible while they were being assisted with personal care, such as staff closing curtains or screens between beds.

The report noted numerous challenges posed by the structure and layout of the physical environment, including a large ramp leading to one ward which made accessing this area very difficult for residents with reduced mobility.

St Patrick's is one of 21 nursing homes across the country which has been given until July to meet HIQA's standards or face sanctions, including a forced reduction in their number of residents or high-dependency patients and the prevention of the hospital from admitting more patients. However St Patrick's has not been earmarked for capital funding in the Health Service Executive (HSE) service plan for 2015 to enable those works to be carried out.

In a statement, the HSE said it was "currently working with HIQA around our public units which are currently registered but will be up for re-registration during 2015".

The HSE said each unit will be inspected by HIQA and a decision made about re-registration on a unit-by-unit basis. However, they said it would be "pre-emptive of the HSE to identify what the outcome of the inspection process will be". HIQA has said if a centre is not in compliance by July 1, 2015, and if no realistic time-bound costed/funded plan has been agreed with the authority, then 'appropriate conditions' will be attached to any renewal of registration.

In 2009, the 19-bed upper floor St Brigid's Ward in St. Patrick's Hospital, Waterford, was closed by the HSE on foot of a report from HIQA which cited concerns in regard to health and fire safety.

Arrangements were made for a total of 30 private nursing home beds to be made available and the then government also promised to build a new 50-bed Community Nursing Unit on the grounds of St Patrick's.

A campaign group including local public representatives and support group the Friends of St Patrick's have since campaigned for this commitment to be met, with weekly protests taking place outside the hospital at lunchtime on Tuesdays, but the project has failed to be included in the HSE's capital projects list since.

The HIQA report acknowledged that the HSE, to achieve compliance, was drawing up a detailed plan for a 100-bed replacement unit on the grounds of St Patrick's, with the design team tender documents prioritised to be drawn up in the first quarter of 2014.

Following a query by The Munster Express, however, the HSE confirmed that a design team had been appointed but estimated that the design and planning process will not now be completed until later this year.

"Construction of the new unit would commence thereafter, subject to funding approval and it is anticipated that the construction will take up to approximately 24 months", a spokesperson said.

"A commissioning and equipping phase of approximately three months to prepare the building for operation is also envisaged."

The new residential care unit, should it receive capital funding, will include provision for Psychiatry of Old Age, with patients to be moved from St Otteran's to the new unit.