

Hospital Heartbreak



Rita Doherty with a picture of her late husband Andrew, who died in University Hospital Waterford on Monday, November 10th.

Widow seeks apology from HSE after death of husband at UHW

A Cheekpoint man recuperating from coronary stent surgery at University Hospital Waterford who complained of chest pains on a Sunday afternoon was told he was suffering from a panic attack and no consultant would be available to see him until the following day, according to his family.

Andrew Doyle, aged 82, died 24 hours after making his chest pain complaint known.

Widow Rita Doherty, along with Independent TD John Halligan, have called for an investigation into the death of her husband and are seeking an apology from the HSE over the way the family were treated.

The father of six, who worked as Shipping and Transport Manager in the Paper Mills for many years before co-founding Osprey Couriers with his son Richard, had been admitted to Ardkeen last October for the implantation of two stents.

Having previously had three stents implanted, he was very positive about the procedure, Rita said. Just weeks earlier, the active couple had been on holiday together in Budapest.

Ten days into his recuperation, on Sunday, November 9th, Andrew began to feel chest pains. Rita - who was visiting him at the time - called the nurse on duty.

"He had been doing great and was due to come home the next day," she said. "He was looking forward to a bit of Hickey's bun with creamery butter and blackcurrant jam.

"I had helped him change into a clean pyjamas but then he started to feel chest pains. The nurse who came in said he was having a panic attack and he needed some time alone to rest.

"I could see the fear in his eyes and the last thing he said as I left the ward was 'You know how much I love you'. I hated leaving him but I thought I was doing the right thing. I'll have that regret haunting me until the day I die."

Rita was at the home of her daughter Jacqui an hour later when a phone call came from the hospital saying Andrew's condition had deteriorated significantly and they needed to return urgently.

In the lift on the way up to the ward, Mrs Doherty and her daughter met a priest who told them he had been at the bedside of a dying man who "fought with every breath to stay alive".

The priest came to find Mrs Doherty later that night when he realised that the man he was referring to was actually her husband, Andrew.

A number of staff members were working on Andrew Doherty when his family arrived at the coronary care unit. However he passed away during these attempts to revive him.

"A junior doctor said to me after that it was his first time seeing my husband, he did not know the full history and could do nothing until the consultants returned on Monday morning.

"I'll never forgive myself for leaving him that evening. I should have stayed. I never got to say goodbye to him. We'll never know if he would have survived, if a consultant had been on duty to see him. But the point is, he never got that chance. I've known him since I was 13 years old, he never crossed a road without me. I'm so lost without him."

Deputy Halligan, who wrote to the hospital to complain about Mr Doherty's care, raised the case with Health Minister Leo Varadkar in the Dáil last week.

"No doctor was called and no consultant was informed of the change in Andrew's condition as it was the weekend," Deputy Halligan said.

"It is beyond incredible that a man of his age complaining of chest pain and an unsettling feeling in the chest area, who had been in hospital for serious cardiac care and had received a number of stints, could have been dismissed so easily out of hand and told he was having a panic attack."