

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF KERRY COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, ÁRÁS AN CHONTAE, TRALEE ON
MONDAY 28TH JANUARY 2008, TO DISCUSS THE HEALTH SERVICE IN
COUNTY KERRY**

**MIONTUAIRISCÍ NA CRUINNITHE SPEISIALTA DE COMHAIRLE
CONTAE CHIARRAÍ A THIONÓLADH I SEOMRA NA COMHAIRLE, ÁRÁS
AN CHONTAE, TRÁ LÍ, AR AN LUAN 28 EANAIR, 2008 CHUN NA SEIRBHÍŚÍ
SLÁINTE I GCONTAE CHIARRAÍ A PHLÉ.**

PRESENT/I LÁTHAIR

Councillors/Comhairleoirí

J. Brassil	T. Buckley	M. Connor-Scarteen
B. Cronin	T. Ferris	S. Fitzgerald
T. Fitzgerald	T. Fleming	N. Foley
D. Healy-Rae	D. Kiely	P. Leahy
B. O'Connell	P. McCarthy	A. McEllistrim
T. O'Brien	J. O'Connor	M. O'Shea
L. Purtill	J. Sheahan	M. Healy Rae

IN ATTENDANCE/I LÁTHAIR

Mr. T. Curran, Co. Manager	Mr. J.D. Flynn, Dir. of Corp. Services
Mr. G. O'Brien A/SEO Corp. Affairs	Mr. P. Corkery, Press & Comm. Officer
Ms. B. Reidy, S.S.O. Corp. Affairs	Ms. L. Sheehan, CO Corporate Affairs

The meeting commenced at 10:15am.

The Mayor Cllr. M. Healy-Rae took the Chair.

The Mayor welcomed the Mayor of Killarney, Cllr. Niall O'Callaghan, Mr. Colm Burke MEP and the Consultants to the meeting. He said that it was rather ironic that the meeting was being held in the Council Chambers as he was reliably informed that this section of the building was previous the Male Medical Ward. This building was in its past life the very centre of health services in the County.

He welcomed the invited guests who would address the elected representatives of this County and said that the members wanted to hear what they had to say on the health service. These people, on a daily basis, make decisions that can and have a profound effect on the lives of the people they are trusted to care for and it is the duty of all members to listen to them. The Doctors and Consultants present have in the past year treated 80,000 patients both as inpatients and outpatients in our hospitals in Kerry and to put it into prospective, this is the full capacity of Croke Park. Members are all aware of

the problems that exist within our health service. It goes without saying that on a daily basis elected representatives will have a query from some member of the public regarding health care. He called on all members to afford all courtesies to the guest speakers, some of whom are on call and their time is of great value to the people of Kerry. He called on members to put their respective political party differences to one side and to set an example to the legislators of this Country. He called on all parties to work together to find solutions, not to be focusing on problems, but to focus on solutions. It will not benefit anyone if members were to descend into a political debate on past decisions made and the focus must be on the futures and how best to tackle the health service and to give to the people of Kerry a service that they can be proud of. As Mayor he intended to listen to everyone, as it is only by listening to the differing views and respecting those views that progress can be made. He added that it was important that the members of Kerry County Council as elected representatives are not alone seen to be attempting to solve problems, it is also just as important that they are seen to be willing to listen to views that may be contrary to their own and in doing so, members can set an example to the House of the Oireachtas, where an all party approach may well be the best way forward. In conclusion, he said that it has come to a time when playing politics with our health service is no longer acceptable.

Mr. G. O'Brien A/S.E.O. Corporate Affairs informed the meeting that apologies were received from the following who could not attend the meeting:- Dr. Brendan Lynch, Consultant Psychiatrist; Dr. Louis Keary, Consultant Cardiologist and Cllr. Miriam McGillicuddy, Mayor of Tralee. He also advised members that the following letter was received from Mr. Gerry O'Dwyer, Hospital Networks Manager, Southern Hospital Group, in relation to the meeting. He then read Mr. O'Dwyer's letter into the record of the meeting.

"I refer to your letters dated 22nd January 2008 to Ms. Margie Lynch, General Manager, Kerry General Hospital, Mr. Tom Leonard, Local Health Manager, Kerry Community Services and myself as Network Manager regarding attendance at a Special Meeting of Kerry County Council on Monday next 28th January 2008. Your correspondence refers to a special meeting to discuss Health Services in Co. Kerry and outlines an Agenda referring to presentations from Administrators from Kerry General Hospital. Neither Ms. Lynch nor myself had received any contact prior to this regarding the making of a presentation.

As you are aware from previous correspondence, the Health Service Executive (HSE) was established on January 1st 2005, under the Health Act 2004, and replaced the former Health Boards, including the Southern Health Board along with other organisations related to the delivery of health and personal social services.

Under Section 42 of the Health Act, the Regional Health Forum, South was one of 4 Regional Health Forums established from 1st January 2006 by Ms. Mary Harney, Minister for Health and Children. The Forums were set up as a mechanism for involving public representatives and allows members 'to make such representation to the Executive (HSE) as the Forum considers appropriate on the range and operation of health and

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*personal social services provided within its functional area'. It comprises of 39 members from the City and County Councils in the administrative area of Carlow County Council, Cork City Council, Cork County Council, **Kerry County Council**, Kilkenny County Council, South Tipperary County Council, Waterford County Council, Waterford City and Wexford County Council.*

*Forum meetings are held 6 times a year and **Kerry County Council** is currently represented on the Regional Health Forum, South by Cllrs. Michael Cahill, Tom Fleming, John Sheahan, Brendan Cronin and Michael Healy-Rae. These nominated Members from local authorities may submit Notices of Motion and Questions which are formally responded to by the relevant Senior Manager/Managers from all services who attend each one of these meetings. Along with the Forum/Forum committee meetings, local meetings have been set up between the members and Ms. Margie Lynch, General Manager, Kerry General Hospital and Mr. Tom Leonard, Local Health Manager for Primary Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) services. The first of these meetings was held on 20th November and these will be held periodically to keep members of the Forum updated on local health matters.*

Further details on the Regional Health Forum, South can be obtained from Ms. Elaine O'Mahony, Administrative Manager, Regional Health Office, South at (021) 4923603.

Please note that the HSE is a public body and that its accountabilities as such are acknowledged, respected and exercised. As part of this formal accountability, the CEO regularly appears before Committees of the Oireachtas and, in addition, members of the Oireachtas receive answers to Parliamentary Questions and representations and receive briefings from the CEO and senior HSE Management. Local Authorities appoint the membership. Forum members receive responses to Motions and Questions, are briefed and updated, debate on health issues, decide on representations to the HSE and may report back to their appointing Authorities – in this case, Kerry County Council. Representations and queries from individual County Councillors are also welcomed, either directly to the relevant Manager or via the staff in the Regional Health Office.

In this context, you will appreciate that it will not be possible for HSE personnel to attend the meeting."

The Mayor then called on Mr. Tom McCormack, Consultant Surgeon, to address the meeting.

Mr. McCormack thanked the Mayor and members for the opportunity to address the Council and said that this was very much appreciated. Consultants are anxious to address the shortfalls and deficiencies in the Health Service and he called on members to help them to lobby for better services for Kerry. He added that each consultant would speak on their own speciality. Mr. McCormack informed the meeting that Kerry General Hospital is the second largest hospital in the southern region. It has 274 acute beds and a catchment population of 140,000. By 2020 the population will have increased to

150,000. Already the proportion of elderly people is one of the highest in the Country. In the future, there will be more cancers, more heart disease and a huge demand for joint replacements.

Endoscopy Unit

Mr. McCormack informed members that this is an out-patient department where telescopic examination of the bowel, bladder and lungs are done to detect ulce, bleeding and cancers. There are 600 patients waiting for examinations. The average wait is 5 months. From the time a patient sees their doctor to having an examination, it can be one year. The solution is to double the size of the unit and increase the staff.

Intensive Care

Mr. McCormack said that this unit is working at critical capacity to the extent that patients who need the service frequently can not avail of it, resulting in cancellation of their surgery. The hospital needs an area which provides a slightly lower level of care (but far above that needed on the ward) called the “High Dependency Unit”. This unit has existed for 4 years (paid for by the “Friends of Kerry General Hospital”) but our requests for nursing staff have been refused. The solution is to staff this High Dependency Unit now and plan for a new HDU/ITU which will be several years down the line.

Outpatient or Day Surgery

Mr. McCormack stated that nowadays very many operations can be down on a day patient bases. This is better for the patient (less time in hospital, less complications like infection etc) and saves the need for in-patient beds. A five bedded day ward was equipped three years ago but remains unstaffed because of a HSE embargo on the employment of nurses. We are the only sizeable hospital in the Country without a Day Ward. The solution is immediate staffing and the development of a unit at least twice the size, which will be needed to provided a service for the future.

Accident and Emergency

Mr. McCormack informed the meeting that a new department is badly needed and has been designed and sanctioned. However, staff are needed for the unit now and two Consultant posts are vacant. These have not been filled because candidates for the post do not feel that there is an adequate number of nursing and junior staff in the department. He outlined the number of patients attended to at Kerry General for a year, in comparison with those attended at St. Vincents as follows:-

	Kerry General	St. Vincents
Patient/Year	35,000	27,000
Doctors	7	26
Nurses	26	100

The solution is to staff the unit now, so that staff will be adequate when the new unit comes online.

Medicine

Dr. Richard Liston, Consultant Physician informed members that it is important to appreciate the very good service being provided at Kerry General Hospital and Consultants only want this service to be brought up to the same level as other hospitals. He said that there was a chronic shortfall of staff leading directly to delays in processing patients for admission and discharge. They cannot, for example, run an effective Medical Assessment Unit with sufficient staff. Comparable units are staffed as follows:-

Letterkenny	7 Consultants	28 NCHD
Kilkenny	6 Consultants	22 NCHD
Clonmel	6 Consultants	21 NCHD
Wexford	6 Consultants	18 NCHD
Kerry	4 Consultants	16 NCHD

Dr. Liston stated that the figures speak for themselves and the population served by Kerry General Hospital is bigger than any of the above areas. There is now a part-time Cardiologist at Kerry General and this has made a huge difference to the care of patients with heart disease. Kerry General is large enough to warrant the appointment of a full-time if not two full-time Consultant Cardiologists. Kerry has the highest rate of cardiovascular disease in men in the EU. He added that Kerry General now has a part time cardiologist which has made a huge difference to the care of patients with heart disease. If the Working Time Act and the new Consultants contracts are to be adhered to additional staff will be required. The solution for the future of medical care in Kerry is an increase of staffing and the appointment of a second Cardiologist.

Orthopaedics

Mr. John Rice, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon then addressed the meeting.

Mr. Rice informed the meeting that Orthopaedics' embraces two disciplines, 1. Traumas and 2. Elective Surgery. Trauma patients who need operations usually wait many hours and often days for surgery. This is because the present facilities are inadequate. These facilities include theatre space and the number of nursing, anaesthetic and X-ray staff available. Elective Orthopaedics, i.e. replacement hips and knees, are no longer being done because of a lack of isolated dedicated beds and theatre space. These patients need to be treated in a separate area to the emergency admissions because of the disastrous effects of infection (especially MRSA). At least 200 patients in Kerry need joint replacement each year. At present the National Treatment Purchase Fund pays for some of these patients, but this is very much a temporary solution. That money (approximately €10,000 per patient) would be much more appropriately used to provide long-term services here. The solution is a dedicated Orthopaedic Unit in Kerry General Hospital. The need for this is becoming critical as the demands are increasing each year.

Palliative Care

Dr. Patricia Sheehan, Palliative Care, then addressed the meeting.

Dr. Sheehan informed the meeting that Kerry has no dedicated in-patient palliative care beds. Patients who need this type of care at present are nursed on general medical and general surgical wards. These do not provide the facilities which patients who are dying and their families are entitled to. Their focus is to help improve the quality of life of the patient. Hospice nurses also work very closely with people who are suffering from incurable cancers, Motor Neuron Disease etc. The main aim is to keep the patient at home but sometimes these patients need admission to hospital. Thanks to Kerry Hospice, Kerry General has an Outpatient Department for these patients. Patients are dying in a 6 bedded ward and this is not the right standard of care that they are entitled to. The solution is a 12 bedded in-patient unit. The unit has already been designed and the Kerry Hospice will fund it (cost approx. €3.5 million). Unfortunately the HSE have refused to staff it.

Radiology

Dr. Eamon Bannon, Consultant Radiologist then addressed the meeting.

Dr. Bannon thanked members for the opportunity to address them and said that on Friday last, there was a bad accident outside the town and one patient had a fracture of the thigh bone. The Orthopaedic Surgeon decided that it required surgery and should be done during the weekend. He scheduled the surgery for Saturday morning but he needed the assistance of a Radiographer to guide him in positioning the bone into place. There is only one Radiographer on duty at weekends and this operation would last for between 2 and 3 hours, during this time, there would be no Radiographer to cover the rest of the hospital. This is unacceptable that there are inadequate staff numbers in place to provide a proper level of care. In 1997, 35,000 x-rays were performed while last year this number increased to 73,000. The staffing level in 1997 was 14 and it is now 14. This is completely unacceptable and the situation is at crisis point and badly needs to be addressed. While management at Kerry General agree the HSE are turning a deaf ear. There are 3 Radiologists employed at Kerry General while similar size hospitals have 5, 6 or 7 Radiologists. The position regarding radiographic staff is the same. Kerry General has 14 while other similar size hospitals have 20. The solution is the sanctioning of additional staff to ensure that an adequate level of cover can be provided at all times.

Obstetrics

Dr. Mary McCaffrey then addressed the meeting.

Dr. McCaffrey thanked the members for the opportunity to address them. In comparison with the rest of the hospital, the news from the Maternity Unit is positive. During the years 1997 – 1998 approximately 1,000 babies were delivered at Kerry General each year and at that time $\frac{1}{3}$ of Kerry women travelled to Cork to have their babies. In 2007, 1800 babies were delivered at Kerry General and it is expected that this figure will increase to 1900 in 2008. This has led to an increasing need for theatre time for caesarean sections. At night and at weekends there is only one Anaesthetist and theatre team to cater for obstetrics, orthopaedics and surgical emergencies. The majority of Kerry women now have their babies at Kerry General Hospital. Despite the increase in the number of babies

born at Kerry General, there are actually less beds available as a number of additional services have now been provided with the same number of beds. Nurses are exhausted and suffering from burnout. The minimum solution is a dedicated theatre and staff for obstetrics. The proper solution if we are to provide the best care for the future is a dedicated stand alone obstetric unit. If this was provided it would automatically free-up the theatres and beds for other disciplines and would have a significant positive impact on the rest of the hospital. It is important that the quality of service now being provided is maintained. She added that her Department made a submission to the HSE on this issue a number of years ago yet it appears to be sitting somewhere between the HSE and the Department of Health without any progress. In conclusion she stated that her Department serves North Cork, West Limerick, parts of Clare and Kerry.

Anaesthetic Department

Mr. Sean Gibbons, Consultant Anaesthetist then addressed the meeting.

Mr. Gibbon thanked the members for the invitation to address them. In his Department there are 6 consultants and 6 non-consultant staff who provide life support service, epidurals and a whole range of services. The Intensive Care Unit is a very over stressed unit and a High Dependency Unit or step down unit is urgently needed. 6 years ago plans were drawn up for this unit but he did not believe that it had progressed. It is a major concern that with the new structures in the HSE, local politicians are virtually eliminated from the process and he was conscious of the fact that under the new structures the big city hospitals are in a better position to get their requirements than the likes of Kerry General. He requested the assistance and support of members in ensuring that the High Dependency Unit which has already been fitted out, is staffed adequately and also that a new Maternity Unit would be provided which would free up theatres and beds for other services within the hospital.

Mr. Tom McCormack reassured members that Kerry General Hospital is a very good hospital but it is in real danger unless proper funding is provided. The difficulties being experienced have been outlined to the HSE and the lack of a clear response has been frustrating. They now appear to be more concerned about paper work than providing an adequate service. The services provided at present are woefully deficient in the hospital and there is a severe shortage of nurses. He added that the cancer strategy is very important but said that this issue will be decided nationally.

The Mayor then called on the Party Whips to address their questions to the Consultants.

Cllr. T. Fitzgerald, on behalf of the Fianna Fail Party, welcomed the Consultants to the meeting together with the representatives of Kerry Hospice. He welcomed the opportunity to hear at first hand from the people delivering this service at Kerry General Hospital. They have clearly indicated that the present level of service is inadequate and he called on Oircheatas Members to use their mandate at a national level, to ensure that the shortfalls are addressed. He assured the Consultants that they have the full support of the members of Kerry County Council and said that he was concerned that the Regional Health Forum was not an adequate Forum to address all these issues. The non-attendance

of HSE Management at the meeting was not acceptable and the people of Kerry are entitled to answers. In conclusion he thanked all the Consultants for their presentations.

Cllr. B. O'Connell, on behalf of the Fine Gael Party, said that this is a very serious issue for all the people of Kerry and the position as set out by the Consultants is very alarming. In recent times, the HSE and the Government have only been paying lip-service to the Health Service. The difficulties being experienced at Kerry General were well articulated by the Consultants and if these are not addressed, it will have serious implications for the people of Kerry into the future.

Cllr. T. Ferris, on behalf of the Sinn Féin Party, said that she wished clarify the misconception that the HSE said that they did not attend the meeting as they were not given sufficient notice. The letter from the HSE states that the proper forum to address these issues is the Regional Health Forum South or through an Oireachtas Committee. It is not surprising that management at the HSE did not attend the meeting. She proposed that they be given the opportunity to give the real reason why they were not in attendance and that they be given 5 or 6 weeks notice and that all questions would be given to them in advance to allow them the opportunity to address them. She proposed that a letter be sent to the HSE outlining the queries from the members and inviting them to a future meeting of the Council. She thanked the Consultants for attending the meeting and for their presentations. She assured them that they had the full support of all the members of Kerry County Council. She added that she was disgusted at the conditions that they have to work in, but said that the service at Kerry General has not been found wanting.

Cllr. T. O'Brien, on behalf of the Labour Party, said that it was very sad that the Consultants had to come to a meeting of Kerry County Council to air their grievances. Members are all aware of how poorly Kerry General is staffed. He added that the Regional Health Forum is only a talking shop and the big issue is the level of staffing at Kerry General in comparison to other hospitals. It is only the good will of staff that is keeping the hospital functioning. He thanked the Consultants for attending the meeting and for their presentations and assured them that they have the full support of the Labour Party.

Cllr. D. Healy-Rae welcomed the Consultants and complemented them on their presentations which highlight their concerns regarding Kerry General Hospital. He stated that the chain of accountability is gone with the HSE since the abolition of the South Health Board. Regardless of the notice given to the HSE, some member of staff should have attended the meeting. Considerable funding has been raised in Kerry to provide equipment for Kerry General Hospital, yet the HSE will not provide the staffing for it. The southern half of the County is remote from Tralee and even more so from Cork and he requested that as much cancer care as possible be retained in Kerry General and this service should be enhanced. He also called for an extension of the services provided at the District Hospitals around the County, as this would ease the pressure on Kerry General. He pointed out that there is a serious shortage of Orthodontists and Psychologists in Kerry and these services should be provided. In conclusion, he said that the HSE should be more accountable to elected members.

Cllr. B. Cronin welcomed the Consultants to the meeting and said that this was one of the most important information meetings ever held by Kerry County Council. The facts placed before the Council are startling and he called on the Press to give due publicity to them, to ensure that all these facts are in the public domain. He added that the HSE letter is a “fob-off” and he believed that regardless of the notice given they would not have attended. He stated that he was a newly elected member to the Regional Health Forum South and he assured the Consultants that he would seek answers to their questions at that Forum. He supported all the demands set out by the Consultants and he agreed that the HSE has too many managers and not enough doctors and nurses. Consultants referred to the shortage of nurses in the hospital and he asked if they were given approval would it be possible to recruit nurses. He asked what was their assessment of the new HSE structure against the old Southern Health Board. In conclusion he asked if there was any hope of retaining the Breast Clinic in Tralee.

Mr. T. McCormack said that no posts have been sanctioned by the HSE and he understood that funding is available. The future of the cancer service has not yet been decided and negotiations are on-going and he was hopeful that the Breast Clinic would be retained..

Cllr. T. O’Brien said that he understood that the contracts being offered to nurses are short-term temporary contracts and this is the reason it is virtually impossible to recruit nurses.

Mr. T. McCormack stated that it is very difficult to attract nurses to work at Kerry General because too few permanent contracts are being offered.

Cllr. T. Fitzgerald asked if the present cancer services being provided at Kerry General Hospital is in fact a Centre of Excellence.

Mr. T. McCormack said that the cancer services provided for cancer patients would be most beneficial in the Centres of Excellence. He understood that the very good Oncology Unit in place in Kerry General would continue. He did not envisage that a Radiology Unit would be provided in Kerry General Hospital as it could not be justified. He added that the Consultants had outlined the problems for the members and he hoped that they would help them to lobby for improved services.

The Mayor assured Mr. McCormack that all the members of Kerry County Council would fully support them in their efforts to lobby the HSE and the Government for better services.

The Mayor then called on Mr. Paul Garnett, Manager, Bons Secour Hospital to address the meeting.

Mr. Garnett thanked the members for the opportunity to address them. He stated that the Bon Secours Hospital is in Kerry since the 1920’s and they are providing a very valuable

service. He has been Manager of the Bon Secours since the early 1990's and since then the hospital has continued to grow. 51% of the population in Kerry is insured and this has increased over the years. He saw the role of the Bon Secours as a supporting role to Kerry General Hospital. Specialist appointments are available at the Bon Secours and a Consultant Cardiologist was recently appointed and it is intended that a second Cardiologist would be appointed later this year. It is also intended to open a Cardiology Laboratory. There will be further major developments at the Bon Secours Hospital with an anticipated €20 million investment. He complemented Kerry General Hospital on the excellent service they provide and said that his hospital would be providing a supporting role.

The Mayor then called on Dr. Eamon Shanahan to address the meeting on behalf of General Practitioners in the County.

Dr. Shanahan thanked the staff of Kerry General Hospital, whom he said provide an excellent service to all their patients. The GP's contact with Kerry General relates to direct referrals and it is important that the contact between GP's and Kerry General is developed further to ensure that a good quality service continues to be provided into the future. He tries to avoid sending his patients to A & E and this is no fault of the staff at this Department but it is due to the volume of work that they have to deal with on a daily basis. He called on the HSE to develop a properly resourced Admissions Unit, so that patients would not be admitted through A & E. The nature of GP's work has changed significantly down through the years. They are now dealing with chronic illnesses and 85% of people with these conditions are dealt with by their GP. He stated that he would like to see the chronic disease service developed to ensure that adequate back-up is available for GP's. Surgeons and Physicians at Kerry General Hospital provide an extraordinary service and he would like to see these services developed further. He said that the HSE was being run by accountants and he was concerned at how Kerry General Hospital would move forward. He expressed concern that adequate staffing levels are not being provided and this could impact on the development of services into the future.

Cllr. T. Fitzgerald paid tribute to the Bon Secours Hospital and the excellent service they provide to the people of Kerry. He wished them well as they continue to improve their services. He welcomed Dr. Shanahan and the issues highlighted on behalf of GP's in the County. Two years ago it was announced that a new A & E Unit would be provided at Kerry General Hospital, but there has been no progress on it since then.

Cllr. B. O'Connell asked if there was a need for a full time Microbiologist at Kerry General Hospital in particular, having regard to the prevalence of the "winter vomiting bug" and "MRSA".

Cllr. T. Ferris said that the Isle of White has the same population as Kerry and the HSE were requested to visit there, to undertake a study of their health services. At the time they indicated that they would do this and she asked the Consultants if they were aware if the HSE had in fact visited the Isle of White. She asked if there was a Physio-geriatrician needed for Kerry General and she appealed to all the Consultants not to be disheartened.

Cllr. T. O'Brien welcomed Mr. Paul Garnett from the Bon Secours Hospital and expressed concern that it might be very difficult to attract consultants to work at Kerry General Hospital in the future due to the lack of staffing.

Cllr. D. Healy-Rae welcomed Mr. Paul Garnett from the Bon Secours Hospital and thanked him for his presentation. He asked if a patient attended a Consultant in the Bon Secours Hospital and his condition deteriorated and had to be admitted to Kerry General Hospital could the Consultant from the Bon Secours Hospital treat him in Kerry General Hospital. He hoped that level of co-operation and flexibility would be forth-coming to the benefit of the patient. He thanked Dr. Eamon Shanahan for his presentation and said that it was time to revert back to the Southern Health Board and to restore the chain of accountability.

Cllr. B. Cronin welcomed the presentation from Mr. P. Garnett and Dr. Shanahan. He acknowledged the substantial investment by the Bon Secours Hospital in recent years. The lack of a full time Cardiologist at Kerry General Hospital is a cause for concern, having regard to the incidence of heart disease in Kerry. The focus by the HSE is to balance the books, rather than on the care of patients. He said that there were too many administrators in the HSE and at a meeting of the Regional Health Forum South on the 17th January 2008 he asked when would the HSE appoint an A & E Consultant for Kerry General. The reply indicated that a Consultant would be appointed when negotiations with Consultants were concluded nationally. In conclusion, he complemented Cllr. Pat McCarthy who was responsible for organising this meeting.

Cllr. B. O'Connell asked if €9 million was returned by the HSE South to the Government last year and why there was a delay in getting orthodontic appointments for Kerry patients.

Cllr. P. McCarthy said that he acted as co-ordinator for all parties in the working group who were organising this meeting and he was in constant contact with one Consultant. This meeting was agreed at the December Council Meeting and the date for the meeting was given to the group later that evening. He was assured that one of the consultants was in contact with all parties involved at that time and they were informed that a written invitation would follow.

Dr. Richard Liston said that Kerry General is the only hospital without a full-time Consultant Microbiologist and this is required not just because of MSRA. There was a meeting on this issue a number of years ago, but it appears that no funding is available yet they were not kept informed. This is very frustrating and it was a waste of his time in putting the proposal together. He said that he was not aware of any visit by HSE Management to the Isle of White. A Psycho-geriatric Consultant is needed at Kerry General and Kerry General is the only hospital that does not have one. He understood that the HSE have promised that this post will be funded and they have also promised that an additional Consultant Geriatrician will be appointed to support the community service.

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Mr. Paul Garnett informed the meeting that the Bon Secours Hospital has 130 beds and he assured members that consultants do cross-over between both hospitals and do consult with each other on patients. When Kerry General Hospital is under pressure in the A & E the Bon Secours Hospital takes patients as beds become available.

Mr. John Rice said that he is a Category 1 Consultant and he can only work with for the HSE. He was informed by his colleague in Castlebar that they have a population of 120,000 and they conduct 400 operations a year while just 60 operations are carried out at Kerry General per annum. The statistics speak for themselves.

Cllr. T. Ferris asked if there was a doubt that elective surgery would continue at Kerry General and what were the chances of attracting consultants like Mr. Rice if there was no elective surgery being carried out.

In response Mr. J. Rice said that elective surgery and trauma surgery go hand in hand and it is possible that there would be a centre of specialisation in the future.

Dr. Eamon Bannon said that when the HSE was established Consultants were hopeful that resources would be forth-coming to provide adequate services at Kerry General. Professor Drum announced that resources would not follow where there was a shortfall in services but would in fact go to hospitals like Kerry General where an excellent service is provided.

The Mayor thanked all the Consultants for attending the meeting and also Mr. Colm Burke MEP.

Mr. G. O'Brien A/S.E.O. Corporate Affairs asked the working group to compile a list of questions which he would then forward to the HSE for reply. He asked all members to ensure that their questions are given to the working group for inclusion in their list.

Vote of Sympathy

Cllr. T. Fleming extended a vote of sympathy to the family of the late Dan Kavanagh, former County Engineer and a marvellous footballer.

All members said they wished to be associated with this expression of sympathy.

South West Counselling Centre

The Mayor referred to correspondence that he had received from the South West Counselling Centre regarding a funding crisis and the imminent closure of this centre. He proposed that given that the Southwest Counselling Centre has closed their doors to new clients, as they do not receive adequate funding from the HSE to continue the growing demand for this service. What is proposed in the meantime for people suffering from depression, mental health issues that cannot access much needed counselling at this time, when waiting for child psychiatric services, has a waiting list of 15 months to 2 years. In conclusion he acknowledged the great work carried out by the Southwest Counselling Centre.

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The meeting concluded at 11:40am.

Gerard O'Brien
A/SEO Corporate Affairs

Mayor of Kerry