

'Winter plan' for A&E units in Ireland

According to the HSE, A&E departments see an average of 3,300 people every day, with around one in four of these requiring hospital admission. It said that 152 people were waiting for admission on Tuesday afternoon, 24% fewer people than were waiting at the same time last year.

However the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) said that the situation is still as bad as ever and insisted that 256 people were waiting on trolleys on Tuesday. Announcing the winter plan, the HSE said that it would 'build on work already underway in several different areas of the healthcare delivery system'. It will focus on three main areas - promotion and prevention, hospital avoidance and capacity issues.

As part of promotion and prevention, the HSE will initiate public information campaigns on topics such as the importance of flu vaccination before the onset of winter and fall prevention in older people.

'Hospital avoidance' will include expanding out-of-hours GP services and providing advice and information through pharmacists. A pilot project, 'hospital at home', is also being set up in Dublin to prevent hospital admissions for certain illnesses, such as COPD.

Meanwhile the issue of capacity will be dealt with by, among other things, better managing the flow of patients through the hospital system.

Central to the plan will be the winter plan project team, which will monitor the progress of the initiative and will 'ensure the implementation of required actions to achieve the objectives of the plan'.

This team will report to the CEO of the HSE every week. The national director of the team, John O'Brien, has already put in place eight smaller teams nationwide, made up of local health office managers and hospital managers.

"The primary aim is to get the new organisation working together in a focused way to address the system wide problems which manifest in patients waiting in emergency departments for admission to hospital", Mr O'Brien said.

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