



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority

press release

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STATEMENT FROM RQIA

RQIA Publishes Findings of RVH Emergency Department Follow-up Inspection

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) conducted a follow-up inspection at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) Emergency Department (ED) between November 2023 and January 2024 to check what progress had been made against the Areas for Improvement identified in the previous inspection, which took place between November 2022 and February 2023, and was published on 26 July 2023.

The Follow-up Inspection Report, published on the RQIA website today, also includes The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) responses to the 2022-23 RQIA findings, which form part of the Inspection Report.

In its 2022-23 Inspection, RQIA found overcrowding within the ED that was impacting upon the safety of both patients and staff. This environment extended the ED service well beyond its capacity and outside its core purpose, of providing urgent and emergency care; and the minimum Quality Standards (set by the Department of Health) for HSC services were not met.

This follow-up Inspection was informed through evidence provided by the Trust and by evidence gathered during the onsite visits by RQIA Inspection staff. Importantly, the expressed views and lived experiences of ED staff also made a significant contribution to the findings and the Inspection Report.

Some progress had been made, with 3 of the original 9 Areas for Improvement having been met. However, the Inspection has provided further evidence that overcrowding within the ED continues to impact upon the safety of patients and of staff, and that the ED continues to function well beyond its capacity and outside its core purpose.

Despite the persistent challenges, the Inspection Report highlights areas of good practice. There is evidence of teams continuing to provide mutual support to each other in times of extreme pressure. The significant commitment of both clinical staff and managers to bring forward solutions was ever-present; and the benefits to be gained through co-operation and regional leadership were strongly endorsed by all those with whom the Inspectors engaged.

The Inspection findings at the RVH ED indicate wider issues across the healthcare system in Northern Ireland, which are particularly evident at service and organisational interfaces. These negatively impact on patient flow through the

hospital. This had also been identified in RQIA's System Inspection carried out in the Southern Trust Area, published in January 2024, that had focussed on patient discharge delays, and pointed to the need for leadership and direction for service transformation, notably in social care provision.

RQIA has not issued an Improvement Notice to the Trust in light of the Inspection findings. Issue of an Improvement Notice is at the upper end of RQIA's regulatory powers for HSC statutory services. This decision is influenced by the recognition of the limited degree to which the Trust itself can take action to reduce overcrowding in ED. Most of the issues that are at the heart of overcrowding are attributable to wider system pressures, which need a strategic regional approach and centrally led reform.

Nonetheless there are matters the Trust can address; these are set out with clear evidence within the Report. They include improving internal communication with front line clinical staff, so that staff are involved in and aware of plans and actions to address service concerns, and that these are more effectively shared; and continuing to strengthen the workforce assessment needed across clinical and support services staffing, within emergency services.

The Inspection Report is available [here](#).

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

The RQIA was established by The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. It is an independent health and social care regulatory body, whose primary duties are to keep the Department informed about the quality and availability of health and social care services, ensure regulatory compliance, and encourage improvement in the quality of services.

RQIA carry out inspections of statutory services provided by the Health and Social Care Trusts under Part IV of The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. This legislation also requires HSC Trusts to meet a statutory Duty of Quality for the services it provides and commissions.

RQIA assesses the service against the Department of Health's Quality Standards for Health and Social Care (2006), which set the standards that HSC services are required to meet.

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