



The Regulation and
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Authority

press release

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RQIA Publishes Inspection of the Royal Victoria Hospital Emergency Department (ED) Winter 2022/23

Today, RQIA has published the report of an unannounced inspection of the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) Emergency Department (ED) which took place during last winter.

The inspection focused on the model of care delivered in the ED, looking at patient flow, staffing and environmental factors. The inspection team also considered the management and governance arrangements. RQIA Inspectors witnessed at first hand the operation of the ED, including at night and at weekends, and spoke with patients and with staff.

Inspectors found the service did not comply with the quality standards, set out by the Department of Health for health and social care services in Northern Ireland. It was clear that the ED was operating beyond its core purpose and capacity. This was the result of increased numbers of patients in the department; and patients staying in the ED, beyond their need for emergency acute care, and requiring ongoing care. This was because the pathways out of the ED, whether to admission to hospital wards or for social care needs in the community, were not available. This is often referred to as 'crowding' but it is important to recognise that it is a result of the ED operating well beyond its capacity and beyond its core purpose.

Briege Donaghy, RQIA's Chief Executive said: **"During this inspection, RQIA found a dedicated workforce, who were struggling to deliver care above the ED's capacity and outside of the core purpose of an Emergency Department.**

We have heard the powerful testaments of patients and their families who have accessed ED services and while commending the staff for their compassion and care, have at times been concerned and anxious. Clinical Staff and their professional bodies have told us of their severe concerns, frustrations, and distress at the persistence of the situation.

This RQIA inspection report concurs with these experiences. It describes a service under stress and the inspection findings provide specific evidence of quality and safety at risk.

The inspection report sets out a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that the Belfast Trust has agreed to implement. This will help alleviate some of the immediate safety issues identified, but we must caution that these steps will not resolve the underlying problems.

Without service reform, the ED will continue to be pressed to operate beyond its capacity and outside its core purpose with resulting increased risks to patient safety and to its staff.

RQIA recognise that many of the pressures observed during the inspection are occurring at Emergency Departments across Northern Ireland. We have shared our findings with the Department of Health (DoH). We will liaise with the Healthcare Policy Group to inform the Service Transformation Programme. We will also liaise with the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) of the DoH, to inform a regional response to the findings of this inspection report. This report comes ahead of a predictable increase in demand this coming winter.”

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 our founding legislation, [The Health and Personal Social Services \(Quality, Improvement and Regulation\) \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#). This is also the legislation that requires HSC Trusts to meet a statutory duty of quality for services.

In order to check if the service is meeting the minimum quality standards, RQIA use [The Quality Standards for Health and Social Care \(2006\)](#) as the framework for inspection. These set out five Standards that are required to meet minimum quality standards for HSC services.

The full report will be available at www.rqia.org.uk from 26 July 2023.

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