



The Regulation and  
Quality Improvement  
Authority

press release

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## STATEMENT FROM RQIA

### **RQIA Publishes Findings of Review of the Pathways Associated with the Temporary Suspension of Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital**

Today, RQIA has published the findings of [Expert Review of the Pathways associated with the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital \(SWAH\)](#), commissioned by the Department of Health, in March 2024.

Led by RQIA, the Expert Review Team included doctors with backgrounds in General Surgery, and Emergency Medicine, and Paramedic services. The Team spent time in the SWAH. They met with frontline staff and management, both from the Western Trust and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service; observed services in operation; reviewed documents and available data. The Team visited Altnagelvin Hospital and the Ambulance Control Centre, and met with patients and families and representative groups, who shared their experience of the new arrangements. All of this participation was invaluable to the Expert Review Team in forming its view.

The Review highlighted issues around the information available to the Western Trust in its oversight of the effectiveness of the temporary arrangements put in place. The Review found that better patient-centred information being available to the Western Trust's Board would improve their ability to be alerted to potential issues and concerns, and so enabled to make informed, evidence-based decisions. This included a lack of feedback on the direct patient experience of the new pathways.

The Expert Review Team makes ten recommendations. While focussed on the new pathways put in place as a result of the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery in SWAH from December 2022, the Authority considers that the recommendations of the Review are strategically relevant to all situations where services are changed in a time of crisis.

Where such changes must be made, it is important that systems are put in place to enable Trust Boards to continually assess the new service models for clinical effectiveness, identify problems, and to direct improvements in light of the findings. Patient and frontline staff experience must be at the centre of this; actively sought; and carefully considered. It is important too that information on issues identified and improvements made is shared quickly and accurately with staff involved, and with the public and their representatives.

**ENDS**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)**

The RQIA was established by The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (“the 2003 Order”). 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.

Under Part IV of the 2003 Order, RQIA is empowered to carry out reviews, investigations and (associated with a review or investigation) inspections of all services provided by the Health and Social Care Trusts (“statutory services”). The 2003 Order also requires all HSC Trusts to meet a statutory Duty of Quality for the services they provide or commission.

RQIA bases its assessment of statutory health and social care services on the Department of Health’s Quality Standards for Health and Social Care (2006), which set the quality standards that HSC services are required to meet.

### **Review of the Pathways Associated with the Temporary Suspension of Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital (SWAH):**

#### **Terms of Reference**

1. Assessment of the current pathways, developed in response to the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH). To include:
  - Describe the full range of mitigations and clinical pathways developed by Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCCT) and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) in response to these changes.
  - To describe the process of development, communication/dissemination, implementation and ongoing review of these clinical pathways (to include engagement with relevant stakeholders).
  - Assess the current effectiveness of these clinical pathways in respect of supporting compliance with relevant clinical guidelines and best practice.
  - Identify any omissions in the mitigations, protocols or pathways developed.
  - Assess the effectiveness of arrangements for monitoring the direct and indirect impact of these pathways on accessibility, quality and safety.
2. To seek the views and experiences of Health and Social Care staff, and service users in respect of the pathways and protocols associated with the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at SWAH.
3. To provide a report on the findings and where relevant, make recommendations to support improvements in accessibility, quality and safety.
4. To escalate any emerging patient safety concerns identified during the course of the review to the WHSCCT and the Department of Health.

## Scope

- The scope of this review is restricted to examination of the clinical pathways associated with the temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery, and their direct and indirect impacts.
- The scope may require examination of aspects of primary care, referral routes in and out of hospital, paramedic protocols and available capacity within receiving sites, and in transport services.

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