

**MINUTES OF THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE MID-  
WESTERN HEALTH BOARD HELD IN THE BOARDROOM,  
31/33 CATHERINE STREET, LIMERICK ON  
FRIDAY, 17<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2003 AT 11A.M.**

- |                              |   |   |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Presiding/</b>            | Cllr/ S. Hillery, Chairman  |   |
| <b>Present/</b>              | Dr. Y. Begley<br>Cllr. P. Bugler<br>Cllr. J. Casey<br>Cllr. J. Clifford<br>Sen. N. Coonan<br>Ms. N. Fitzpatrick<br>Ms. M. Hogan<br>Ms. A. Kenny-Ryan<br>Dr. P. McKenna<br>Ms. M. O'Donnell<br>Dr. J. O'Riordan  | Cllr. J. Bourke<br>Mr. P. Burke<br>Cllr. B. Chambers<br>Dr. D. Clinch<br>Cllr. J. Egan<br>Cllr./Dr. J. Hennessy<br>Cllr. M. Hourigan<br>Mr. D. McAvinchey<br>Mr. L. MacNamara<br>Dep. J. O'Sullivan<br>Cllr. K. Sheahan |
| <b>Apologies/</b>            | Cllr. R. Butler<br>Ms. S. Marsh   | Cllr. P. Daly<br>Dr. J. Mullane   |
| <b>In Attendance/</b>        | Mr. S. deBurca, Chief Executive Officer<br>Mr. G. Crowley, Assistant Chief Executive Officer<br>Mr. J.O' Brien, Assistant Chief Executive Officer<br>Dr. K. Kelleher, Director of Public Health<br>Mr. J. O'Grady, Regional Manager<br>Mr. T. Hourigan, Regional Manager<br>Mr. P. McDonald, Director of Finance<br>Ms. T. Fitzgerald, Staff Officer<br>Ms. M. Woods, Senior Executive Officer<br>Ms. J. Quinn, Service Planning Unit<br>Ms. M. Halpin, A/Director of Human Resources<br>Mr. Noel Harrington, Communications Unit |   |
| <b>1(a) Urnaí Tosáí</b>      |   |   |
| <b>1(b) Vote of Sympathy</b> | A vote of sympathy was extended to staff who had suffered recent bereavements.  |   |
| <b>1(c) Minutes</b>          | Minutes of meeting of the Board on the 13 <sup>th</sup> December, 2002, were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. B. Chambers, seconded by Cllr. K. Sheahan.  |   |

2. **Correspondence** There was no correspondence
3. **CEO's Report** **The Chief Executive Officer briefed the Members on the following:**

**Private Hospital**

The Bon Secours /BUPA are due to finalise discussions with VHI this week. The Board of Bon Secours is scheduled to meet on Tuesday next and is likely to make a final decision on the Limerick project at this meeting.

**Obstetric Services**

The Board has initiated a review of practice for the handling of emergency admissions, for obstetric and other specialties on foot of correspondence from the Department of Health and Children. This review process is underway and is likely to be concluded by Mid-February.

**A&E Services**

The CEO referred to public concern regarding A&E Departments. He informed the members that this Board has engaged with the Medical Council and that Nenagh & Ennis General Hospitals have fully complied with the Medical Council's interim criteria.

The Board has also implemented a range of measures to improve matters including the review of procedures and processes, improved security, increased staffing extended reception hours and revised Admission, Discharge and Transfer Policies.

The activity in the A&E Departments and in hospitals generally is similar to last year.

The initiatives that the Board has taken includes additional beds, Medical Day Unit and Observation Unit at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital and the Minor Injuries Unit at St. John's Hospital. These are key to the Board's capacity to respond to patient demands.

### **Consultant posts**

The Consultant Rheumatologist, Nephrologist and Vascular Surgeon have been approved by Comhairle na nOspidéal and will be advertised temporarily in the coming weeks. The Statutory Requests for the permanent appointments will be forwarded to the LAC.

The Lead Surgeon for the Symptomatic Breast Disease Service is currently with Comhairle for approval.

### **Third Consultant in Geriatric Medicine**

Dr. Clinch enquired as to the current status of the Third Consultant in Geriatric Medicine, which was contained in Service Plan 2002, but which does not appear in this years Service Plan.

Mr. Ger Crowley, Asst. CEO, confirmed that the need for such a post was established and would continue to be highlighted to the Dept. of Health and Children.

### **Neurology**

The Southern Health Board has advised the CEO that they are withdrawing the services of the Consultant Neurologist who provides an out-patient service to this Board on a fortnightly basis.

This withdrawal will cause a serious deficit in patient care in this region. The Southern Health Board has been requested to reconsider the position in view of the Comhairle na nOspidéal review of this Service, which is ongoing.

### **Villa Maria**

The CEO informed those present that this has been on the agenda for some time and there is a need to progress and finalise this issue.

Mr. L. MacNamara informed the meeting that LRC hearing is taking place on the 12<sup>th</sup> February.

An Open Day at Villa Maria is being

planned by the Mental Health Service, to which the Board Members will be invited to attend.

#### **National Treatment Purchase Fund**

The Executive has received correspondence from the NTPF indicating that they are prepared to consider breaking the 12 months band due to our performance.

#### **Changes in Health Services structures - Media Reports.**

Mr. P. Burke expressed his concern over the recent media reports regarding Structural Reform and the reorganisation of health service delivery in the country. He spoke of the need for the Board to make a clear statement regarding this issue, as the Mid-Western Health Board may be subsumed into one of the proposed Regional Authorities and service priorities in this region may as a consequence not be given due attention.

The Members expressed their concern that a report of this magnitude has been leaked and while acknowledging that their information regarding the report was taken from media coverage, they welcomed an opportunity to discuss this hugely important issue. Members stated that they were concerned that they did not have an opportunity to be part of the process, and that before the final report is presented to the Cabinet that they would be afforded the opportunity for input.

Dr. Clinch and Mr. P. Burke stated their concerns that the proposed Regional Authorities will be established around the Universities with medical teaching faculties and that if this is the case the areas in which there are no such Universities would have much to lose.

Dep. J. O'Sullivan stated that she was glad to support her medical colleagues on the Board. She stated that it was her concern

that health boards were getting the blame for problems with health care delivery, when the real problem was one of continued chronic under-funding. She said she strongly objected to the proposed subdivision of the country into regions for the purpose of health care delivery.

Cllr's. S. Hillery, P. Bugler, J. Casey, Sen. N. Coonan, Mr. McAviney and Cllr./Dr. J. Hennessy all voiced their concerns in the context of the future of health services for Clare and Tipperary North.

Cllr. M. Hourigan stressed the importance of input from local politicians into decision-making. This point was also echoed by Ms. M. Hogan, who stated that politicians are the democratically elected representatives of the consumers of health care.

Cllr. J. Casey stressed the importance of the democratic process. He expressed his concerns that if local representation was removed that the marginalised elements of society would suffer.

The CEO, replying to the members, stated that he was unable to comment on the report. He indicated his concern at the leaks, while acknowledging the need for a healthy debate on the issues raised. He stated that the current system is over 30 years old and that constructive change can be good. However this Board has been revising structures over the past 10 years - integrating services, introducing Care Groups etc and have been energetic and proactive as a Board in reviewing and initiating change. He emphasised that change has to have a purpose and added value.

Replying to the Members request for a full debate and a special meeting to be convened when the Prospectus Report is released, the CEO informed the members of their need to examine 4 documents - the Prospectus, Deloitte & Touche, Brennan and Hanly reports, which contain key messages for health care reform and which will inform

their decision making

The discussion concluded with the adoption of the following motion:-

On the proposal of Mr. L. MacNamara seconded by Cllr. K. Sheahan it was agreed that the CEO seek a copy of the draft report from the Minister and that a special meeting of the Board be held , prior to the report being presented to the Minister.

**4. Report of the  
CEO's of  
Financial  
Results  
Report No. 1/03**

Report No. 1/03 was noted.

The CEO informed those present that it is anticipated that the Board will have a small budgetary surplus for 2002, which will be carried forward into 2003. He warned the members that the buoyancy that the Board enjoyed in 2002 would not be available in 2003.

**5. Adoption of the  
Service Plans  
2003**

Introducing the Service Plan for 2003, the CEO informed the meeting that the financial allocation for 2003 is €515m. an increase of 3.15% over 2002 (adjusted). He informed the members that funding for this year reflects an Existing Level of Service principle. This effectively means that the level of service is virtually frozen. He indicated that no supplementary allocation will be available for Demand Led Schemes during 2003 and that no extra provision has been made for rising legal costs and for inflation. This means that the Board must set aside contingency funds and that strict financial management will be necessary throughout the year. He confirmed that everything possible would be done to avoid any modification in the level of existing services.

Mr. J.O'Brien, Asst. CEO, Acute Services, informed the meeting that activity levels will be maintained at the 2002 rate and that while increased funding has been received for certain services, such as Cancer, in general there is very little scope for

expansion during 2003. He said that Acute Services projected a break-even for 2003, but that it will be very difficult to maintain. He also flagged the possibility that consideration may have to be given to Summer Closure of certain wards, in the event of a need to realign the budgetary position during the year

Mr. G. Crowley also briefed the members on his areas of responsibility and highlighted the significant issues in each of the Care Groups. He voiced his concern regarding Demand Led Schemes and informed the members that the level of services currently being provided in the community are in excess of the funded levels. He stated that while a number of improvements will take place during the early months of 2003, these are from initiatives funded in 2002.

Replying, the members voiced their concerns regarding the level of funding which has been allocated for 2003.

Ms. A. Kenny-Ryan said that in effect the Board had not received sufficient funds to carry out its business. She proposed that Service Plan Review meetings be held on a monthly basis, in order to monitor closely the developments throughout the year. This was seconded by Cllr. Jim Casey and it was agreed that such a meeting would take place at 10.15a.m. – 10.45 a.m. each month, prior to the Board meeting.

A general discussion took place, to which the majority of members contributed. Most referred to the continuing under-funding of the Board and that with the current ELS policy, that it would be impossible to provide an adequate service to the people of the Mid-West. A number of the members indicated their disappointment that the Mid-Western Health Board has always performed within budget and that no cogniscence appears to be taken of this supporting adoption of the Service Plan, In the absence of a unanimous adoption of

the Service Plan, 2003, the Chairman, Cllr. Sean Hillery called for a vote. There was a total of 22 members present at the time and the result was as follows:

For adoption : 13  
Against : 6  
Abstentions : 3

The Chairman consequently declared that the Service Plan for 2003 was formally adopted.

**6. Evaluation  
Report on the  
Family Group  
Conference Pilot  
Project  
Report No. 2/03**

Report No. 2/03 was noted.

**7. Proposal for  
Radiotherapy  
Services in the  
Mid-West  
Region  
Report No. 3/03**

The Board adopted Report No. 3/03 on the proposal of Cllr. K. Sheahan, seconded by Cllr. J. Bourke.

Mr. J. O'Brien outlined a summary of the report. He recommended the proposal to the Board as a least cost option. Mr. J. O'Brien advised that the Service could be in place within two years. Mr. O'Brien advised that he will forward the report to the Department of Health and Children as a matter of urgency.

Members congratulated and thanked Mr. J. O'Brien the Mid-Western Hospitals Trust and all parties that were involved in bringing this proposal before the Board. They also acknowledged the benefit this would have for patients.

On the proposal of Cllr. K. Sheahan the Chairman undertook to send the report to the Mid-West Oireachtas members to seek their support for the project.

Mr. P. Burke clarified the position regarding the likely opposition to the proposal.

In response to Dep. J. O'Sullivan Mr. J. O'Brien stated that a common Waiting List would be used and access to treatment will



be based on patient needs.

Mr. P. Burke emphasised that travel had a major impact on the decision taken by patients to avail of Radiotherapy at present. In response to a query raised by Dr. Y. Begley the CEO stated that comparative costs are unavailable.

**8. Questions: (a) Question submitted by Cllr. Pat Daly:**

“To ask why the Mid-Western Health Board continues to compute pension abatement on a weekly basis, thus discouraging retired nurses from working on a part-time basis, when most State Department’s and bodies, allow abatement on an annual basis.”

A written reply was circulated and is appended hereto as an integral part of the Minute.

**(b) Question submitted by Ms. Marie Hogan:**

“Would the CEO report on the proposed Pilot Primary Care Project in West Limerick and outline the Service that will be provided”

A written reply was circulated and is appended hereto as an integral part of the Minute.

Signed/

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**Cllr. S. Hillery, Chairman**

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**S. deBurca, Chief Executive Officer**

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**Date**