



Rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine to Staff

2020 finished on a high note with the first vaccine administered in the Saolta Group given to Lorna Quinn, Assistant Director of Nursing and peer vaccinator in UHG on 29 December (photo above). On the 6th of January the first doses of the vaccine were given in Mayo, Portluncula, Roscommon, Sligo and Letterkenny which got 2021 off to a really positive start!



Saolta Tweets

saoltagroup
@saoltagroup

#COVID19vaccinations under way in #Sligo University Hospital today, by the end of the week over 500 staff will be vaccinated. This is Mary Meade, she has worked in #SUH for over 20 years and was the first to receive the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine today.

#HoldFirm #VaccinesWork



Sligo Today and 3 others

7:12 PM · Jan 6, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

26 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 147 Likes

saoltagroup
@saoltagroup

History in making! Our first #covidvaccine recipients from across @saoltagroup.

#CovidVaccinations #COVID19ireland #HoldFirm



marita fogarty and 9 others

8:51 PM · Jan 8, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

10 Retweets 61 Likes

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From @TuamHerald - @Galway_GAA supports our healthcare heroes with Emma Helebert, staff nurse #UHG & Galway senior camogie player; Tracey Leonard, staff nurse #UHG & Galway senior ladies footballer and Eoin McGinn, Assistant Director of Nursing #UHG.



Galway LGFA and 7 others

6:51 PM · Feb 17, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

3 Retweets 16 Likes

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Great news today as #Sligo Health Care Worker vaccination programme is now up and running at Knocknarea Arena IT Sligo. The centre will continue with this vaccination programme over the coming weeks

Read full statement: bit.ly/3bCKFAd



Sligo Today and 3 others

6:14 PM · Feb 25, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

6 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 28 Likes

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@saoltagroup

Delighted to be scaling up our #CovidVaccine programme in the #Mayo region with a new centre opening in Breaffy House Resort today. When the site is fully operational 2,500 vaccines per day will be administered 🙌

@BreaffyResort

More: bit.ly/3rcDnsC



Breaffy House Vaccine Centre

Catherine Donohoe and 6 others

6:53 PM · Mar 22, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity


9 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 74 Likes

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@saoltagroup

Newly established #CovidVaccine centre is up and running in the Abbey Hotel in #Roscommon by the end of this week, we hope to vaccinate 1,800 people. Protecting the local community from COVID-19 and providing hope

Read more: bit.ly/2PfBa2D

@Abbeyros #holdfirm



Roscommon Vaccine Centre

Roscommon People and 2 others

6:44 PM · Mar 22, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

9 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 52 Likes

Saolta Videos

saoltagroup @saoltagroup · Jan 7

Momentous occasion at Roscommon University Hospital as first #CovidVaccine in County Roscommon is administered to Dr Gerry O'Mara, Consultant Physician #RUH 🇮🇪

@RoscommonHerald @RoscommonDaily @RoscommonPeople @shannonsideneews @HSEImm @HSELive @ursmorgan @marygarveyros @RosFmRadio



0:17 3.4K views

2 12 68

Click [here](#) to view

saoltagroup @saoltagroup · Jan 11

"We have 4 times as many inpatients with #COVID19 as we had in the first wave. It's especially important that everyone sticks to the public health advice in order for us to continue to look after people who need intensive care". Dr John Bates, Critical Care Consultant #ICU #UHG.



Dr John Bates
Consultant Anaesthetist, Intensive Care, ICU

My name is Dr John Bates. I'm an Intensive Care Doctor at

0:46 18.7K views

3 58 82

Click [here](#) to view

saoltagroup @saoltagroup · Feb 5

CEO @saoltagroup Tony Canavan with an update on the #COVID19 situation in the hospitals in the West and North West.



Tony Canavan, CEO, Saolta Group

2:13 614 views

7 27

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saoltagroup @saoltagroup · Feb 17

Today is #NationalNoSmokingDay - the perfect day to begin your #QUIT journey. Here is Ashling Coyne, Clinical Nurse Manager, Rapid Access Lung Clinic #UHG with advice in relation to quitting and the supports that are available to help you #QUIT 🚭 #QuittingIsWinning @HSEQuitTeam



Ashling Coyne, Nurse Manager

Lung Clinic in University Hospital Galway. A large part of my

0:46 15K views

6 15

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saoltagroup @saoltagroup · Mar 1

Paul Hooton, Chief Director of Nursing & Midwifery talks about our #COVID19Vaccination recruitment campaign

Now hiring registered healthcare professionals: Nurses, Midwives, Doctors, Paramedics, Emergency Technicians & Pharmacists

Details here: saolta.ie/jobs/saoltacov...

#jobfair



Paul Hooton
Chief Director of Nursing & Midwifery

0:50 581 views

6 13

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saoltagroup @saoltagroup · Mar 8

On International Women's Day we are celebrating the achievements of our colleagues working in #science and #healthcare. We made this short video to appreciate the skilled, trained professionals delivering a vital public service

#IWD2021 🌸 🇮🇪 ❤️

@HSELive @HSEvalues
#weareourvalues



To all our Saolta colleagues

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

0:49 1K views

21 42

Click [here](#) to view

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Chief Executive Officer

Saolta Group



Tony Canavan, CEO

Dear colleagues

The start of 2021 was an extremely difficult time for everyone working in our hospital services. It may seem like an obvious thing to say but I want to acknowledge just how difficult it was and to thank you on behalf of all those who rely on you to provide them with care, for all of your efforts during the third wave of COVID-19.

Looking back now we can see that the numbers of cases started to increase, first in the community, during December and that the numbers in hospitals increased markedly around Christmas time. The new year saw a rapid rise in COVID-19 inpatient numbers across all of our hospitals reaching a peak of 394 on the 19th of January and a subsequent peak of 36 patients with Covid-19 in our ICUs on the 27th of January.

This put significant pressure on all of our services and as a result non-urgent admissions and face-to-face outpatient appointments were cancelled. COVID-19 also had a direct impact on our staff with many contracting the virus and many others being close contacts of people who had COVID-19.

We were reminded again during January and February, just how deadly COVID-19 can be. It is important that we remember those who died with COVID-19 over the last 12 months including the elderly and of course healthcare workers.

It is clear now that the reintroduction of Level 5 restrictions has resulted in a steady reduction in the numbers of cases of COVID-19 in our hospitals over the last number of weeks. This has allowed us to reintroduce some elective procedures and to increase attendances at our OPDs.

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme for staff commenced on 29th December, in GUH with vaccination centres being established across all hospital sites by the end of the first week of January.

Over the last 12 weeks we have rolled out the vaccination programme for healthcare workers across Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway. This includes HCWs from the Saolta Group, those working in the broader HSE, as well as those working outside of the HSE. We have also played a role in the delivery of the vaccination programme in Long-Term Care Facilities and now we are working towards the rollout of the programme to the general population.

The response from staff working in the Saolta Group to the demands of the vaccination programme has been truly remarkable and continues to give hope to people living in the West and the North West, that better, brighter days are ahead of all of us in 2021.

I hope you all have an enjoyable Easter break.

Tony Canavan
Chief Executive Officer

Chief Operations Officer

Saolta Group



Ann Cosgrove, COO

Dear colleagues

As we reach the end of a very difficult first quarter, I want to briefly update you on a number of important areas of work.

Our hospitals are slowly restoring activity following the most recent wave of COVID-19 and as you will be aware we were already challenged in relation to the scale of our inpatient, day case and outpatient waiting lists across the Saolta hospitals.

Although services are substantially restored at this point, managing in a COVID-19 environment has meant that capacity and throughput has been reduced when compared to 2019 – we are likely to continue to see this impact for the remainder of this year. We will be working very closely with Acute Hospitals and the NTPF nationally to recover this loss in activity; this will involve using private hospital capacity with specific SLAs, using NTPF funding to get increased access for surgical procedures, doing additional activity where possible in each of our hospitals and trying to build capacity where possible.

From an infrastructure perspective, work is about to commence on the creation of a temporary ED on the UHG site, which has been COVID 19-proofed and which will be the enabler for main ED/ Women's and Children's development. In MUH, a capital project to expand the ED and AMU is currently being assessed by Estates.

The challenges presented by COVID-19 were all the more difficult because of multi-bedded ward accommodation. This was particularly a challenge in UHG, SUH, PUH and MUH. A capital project is progressing in PUH to create single room accommodation in the vacated OPD space; also construction work on the main 50 bedded single room ward block starts later this year.

We have begun discussions with HSE Estates to progress a ward block development in UHG in line with the HSE Capital Plan 2021. In SUH work starts this year on a four storey extension which will provide two new wards with a total of 42 new single en-suite rooms and additional treatment areas. In LUH additional ward accommodation (39 beds) was created in 2020, part of which is now operational. In MUH the Development Control Plan will be updated and a feasibility study on the location of a ward block development completed. We are also working with Estates in relation to our ICU infrastructure in MUH and LUH which requires investment to create the facilities to meet service demands.

Regarding ICT, we are moving forward with IPMS implementation with work now commenced in PUH for an implementation in the third quarter. We are implementing ICNet system to support the work of Infection Prevention and Control across all of our sites and in CHO West and CHO 1. We will implement a recently procured ICU system in SUH, LUH, MUH and PUH and the project is currently being planned. We will also be setting up the project for the implementation of ICM Order Comms across our sites over the next 1 to 2 years.

Finally I wish you all a very Happy Easter and I hope that you get some time off at some stage over the Easter weekend.

Ann Cosgrove

Thank you to staff from the Saolta Board

I am writing to you all today on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Saolta Group. I know that no words can ever truly convey and express our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for the tremendous work, commitment, dedication and sacrifices you have all made over the past year.



Our Hospital Group has faced perhaps the most unprecedented period of mass critical illness that most of us have seen in our lifetimes. I know that so much has been asked of so many of you but, despite this, you have risen to the many challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic and you have all concentrated first and foremost on caring for our many patients within the Group.

With the recent rollout of the vaccination programme, there is now reason to hope that better days are ahead of us all.

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness," Desmond Tutu.

With my very best wishes to you all

Gerry McManus
Chairman

The Board of the Saolta University Health Care Group was re-appointed by the Minister for Health in December 2020 for a further year.

The Board members are:

Gerry McManus, Chairman

Mary Dunne

Dr Brendan Day

Phyllis Mac Namara

Dariona Conlon

Brian Thornton

Tom Canavan

Darina Kneafsey

Dr John Morris

Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

The vaccination programme has progressed well since commencement on the 29th of December and across the Saolta Group most frontline healthcare workers have received their first dose and many have received their second dose of the vaccine.

The HSE website has information on the rollout of the vaccination programme; immunity, safety and side effects of the vaccines being administered; and links to the vaccine information leaflets. Click [here](#) for more details.

Across the country 580,857 adults have received their first dose of the vaccine and 225,684 have received their second dose (as of 28 March). Updated vaccination figures are published daily by the HSE, with a two-day time lag. These figures are available [here](#).

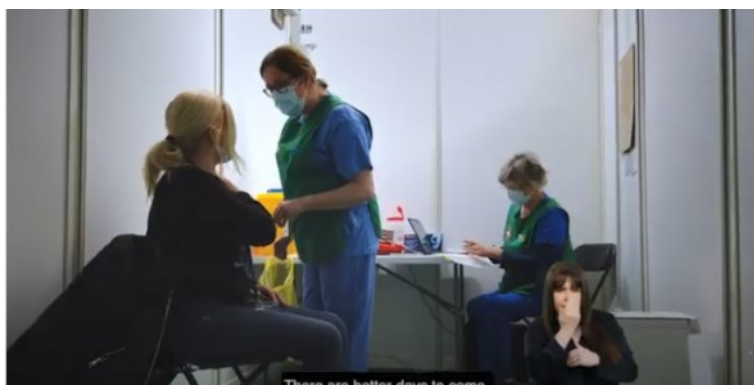
Within the Saolta Group region, five of the vaccination centres developed to administer the vaccine have opened - in Letterkenny, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon and Galway – and work is underway to open the centre in Carrick on Shannon.

The focus currently is on administering the vaccine to the Cohort 4 patients who are very high risk. These are people who have underlying illnesses or are receiving treatment that would leave them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. There are over 20,000 patients in this category across the region.

The vaccination programme in long-term care facilities and in residential facilities under disability and mental health services in the West and North West is largely completed at this stage.

At this time more than 80,000 doses of the vaccine have been administered to adults living in the Saolta region. This has been achieved by the CHOs, the Hospital Groups and the broader health services working collaboratively.

In addition, GPs are currently vaccinating patients aged 70 years and older and this represents another very significant cohort of the population.



Click [here](#) to view the new HSE TV advert featuring footage from the Ballybrit vaccination centre.

Women's and Children's Managed Clinical and Academic Network (MCAN)

We are already well into Spring and a huge focus for our hospitals is to return to delivering safe patient care whilst still in the midst of a very challenging environment of a global COVID-19 pandemic. We are progressing with MCAN projects and ongoing engagement with our sites. Below is a brief update on some of the work in progress.

Clinical Care

- The results of the 2020 National Maternity Experience Survey have been published, showing that nationally 85% of participants had a good or a very good experience of maternity care in Ireland. Most women who took part said that they were treated with respect and dignity and had confidence and trust in staff. This information provides us with valuable insights into their experience of maternity services in our hospitals and in the community from our partners in care.

In response to the survey findings each site has developed a quality improvement plan with clearly defined actions to improve maternity care.

- **"A guide to perinatal post-mortem examination for parents"** has been launched (February 2021). The booklet aims to provide parents who have lost a baby with support and clear information about the post mortem process and its potential value.

It includes explanations on what a post mortem examination is, the reasons for undertaking such an examination and what it involves. We hope this will give support to the parents and has been written with the help of other bereaved parents.

Strategy

- The MCAN is progressing the development of the **Saolta Integrated Paediatric Strategy** and has received positive engagement and feedback following a presentation to the Saolta Executive Council.

We are also engaging with our national colleagues to collate the developmental needs (resources & capital) for the sites and Galway as a Regional Hub.

The Saolta Integrated Paediatric Strategy and Model of Care is underpinned by the existing Saolta Strategy and National Models of Care.

This is an ongoing piece of work with engagement from all of the key stakeholders involved in the safe provision of care and service developments for these patients.

- The **W&C Annual Clinical Report 2019** has been published. It demonstrates the level of activity across all of our 5 hospital sites. The MCAN held a workshop in Q1 2021 to prepare a template on information gathering for the W&C Annual Clinical Report 2020 which aims to standardise the information and presentation of data.

The **W&C Annual Clinical Report 2019** is available to read on saolta.ie by clicking [here](#).

Governance

- Site based engagement is a priority for the MCAN. A schedule of site visits is being mapped out for 2021 with the first site visit with MUH held February 2021.
- We have commenced a schedule of MCAN workshops supported by the PMO which will assist us to focus on delivery of key strategic priorities such as governance, planning and performance, strategy and QPS Framework.

Planning and Performance

- KPI collection continues across the sites and each site has procedures in place to capture this requested data to improve the quality of care we provide to our patients.
- These KPIs will be reviewed as our measurement of performance to strengthen performance management culture and communicate urgent and important information.

Update from the Saolta Project Management Office



The Project Management Office (PMO) is primarily focused on bringing a programmatic approach to service development and delivery across Saolta Hospitals and beyond.

COVID-19 Universal Staff Testing and Vaccination

Programme

Since the last report, the PMO has continued supporting the Regional Vaccination Programme under the governance of the Saolta University Health Care Group.

This includes the co-ordination and support to the governance, completing healthcare worker vaccinations for acute and community staff, Residential Care Facilities, over 70 years in hospital and the ongoing programme for cohort - 4 very high risk vulnerable patients.

Vaccination centres are now in place across the region in Galway, Sligo, Donegal, Mayo, and Roscommon. There is a further centre to open in Carrick-On-Shannon.

To date, more than 80,000 vaccines have been administered between first and second doses under the regional vaccination programme, with a plan to further increase over the coming weeks as the community vaccination centres scale up to full capacity.



Saolta Strategy 2019-2023

Saolta Integrated Governance Project (SIGP)

- The Strategic, Governance, Clinical Care and Quality and Patient Safety priorities are being advanced by the Women's and Children's and Cancer MCAN Teams.
- The Saolta Accountability and Performance Framework is being revised to include MCANs. This revised proposal, once approved by Executive Council, will be implemented from April.
- The MCAN financial budgets were notified in February 2021. The budget validation process, led by the HR Mapping process for the MCANs is currently under review and will progress through Quarter 2.
- Finance Department in partnership with MCANs, is underway.
- The MCAN Academic framework is being finalised in collaboration with the Saolta Academic Office, the Saolta Clinical Research Development Office and the Directors of the MCANs.



Update from the Saolta Project Management Office

Demand and Capacity Analysis

The Demand and Capacity analysis for Saolta Model 3 hospitals has issued its final report. This document sets out an objective assessment of the demand and capacity for both inpatient and day case beds up to 2030. This report will be reviewed at Group Management Team level and circulated over the coming weeks.

Telehealth Project (Attend Anywhere)

The PMO continues to provide joint-lead support to the project, with the COO's Office. Activity across Saolta in this regard has increased in recent weeks, peaking in February and the Group shows the third highest level of patient consultations in the country with each hospital participating.

Saolta Outpatient Project

A Group-wide specialty by specialty profile for outpatients has been completed across Saolta Hospitals and is currently being reviewed. The profile is based on waiting list trends, outpatient activity, New to Review Ratios over the last 3 years.

This will further inform the key focus areas for the scoping of this project in the context of the national scheduled care programme

Saolta Patient Engagement Strategy

This strategy was launched during December. Next steps will include the development of a Steering Group led by the Director of Nursing and Midwifery in order to progress implementation plan across all hospitals.

GP Engagement

The GP Engagement Project has continued with an assessment of the "As Is" and establishment of an Acute/CHO co-ordination group. Feedback from questionnaires issued across Saolta Hospitals and individual GPs will inform the scope of this programme of work covering communication, access, clinical priorities and pathways of care.

A Focus Group meeting took place in March with input from five GPs. A follow up joint group meeting will take place in April. A full update of the Saolta Strategy Project Dashboard is available from the PMO.

Sláintecare

All Sláintecare Integration Fund projects (SIF) are at the implementation phase. However, COVID-19 is impacting across a number of projects. While one of the projects is placed on pause (SIF129B Sligo Heart Failure Integrated Care Service), others have recommenced during March.

A number of SIF projects will be reaching completion/contract end dates over next quarter. A national evaluation framework and process around decision making for mainstreaming is awaited.

Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Services

The rollout of the national Enhanced Community Services Programme (through the introduction of Specialist Ambulatory Hubs) will focus on the Integrated Programme for Older Persons (GICOP) as well as the Chronic Disease Management Programme; with projects related to Cardiac, Respiratory and Endocrinology.

A Joint Steering Group has been established between Community Healthcare West and Saolta to progress Phase 1 of the national programme. CHO1 is included as part of Phase 2 of ECC Funding. Saolta is working in partnership with Community Healthcare West in order to progress key work streams and the approved posts to support the Specialist Ambulatory Hubs.

Vaccination Centres Across the Group

Abbey Hotel Roscommon



Breafter House Resort Castlebar



Ballybrit Racecourse Galway



Knocknarea Arena IT Sligo



LYIT Letterkenny



Virtual Heart Failure Clinics for GPs in East Galway

At the end of last year the Heart Failure Service developed by Portiuncula University Hospital and Galway Primary Care introduced virtual heart failure clinics for GPs in East Galway to discuss treatment plans and improve patient care. Once a week up to six GPs can discuss individual patient symptoms and treatment with the Heart Failure Team, on a one to one basis, via video conference.

In line with Sláintecare's objectives, the service aims to deliver more integrated care, supporting care nearer the home, helping to reduce and prevent hospital visits and supporting the ultimate goal of reducing waiting lists and reducing waiting times.

The service is led by Dr Aidan Flynn, Consultant Cardiologist at Portiuncula University Hospital who said, "Over the past year we have expanded our heart failure service to provide additional services to patients in their local primary care centres.

"We now provide two types of cardiac investigations from three Primary Care Centres in County Galway and one in County Roscommon: an echocardiogram which is an ultrasound test to assess the structure and function of the heart muscles and valves; and holter monitoring which is 24 hour continuous recording of the heart's electrical rhythm to record any irregular heartbeat. Both of these tests are essential in helping to diagnose heart failure and to monitor patients' progress with treatment. In the past these tests were only available in the hospital but now we can bring the services to the patient."

"The next phase of the expansion of the Heart Failure Service is to support GPs who are seeing more patients being diagnosed with heart failure and living with heart failure.

Heart failure is a common life-limiting chronic illness and it is estimated that 90,000 people in Ireland suffer from the disease with 10,000 new cases been diagnosed each year. The increase is mainly due to an aging population, an increase in the number of patients surviving acute cardiac events and the rise in diseases such as hypertension and diabetes."

Click [here](#) for more.



From left: Siobhan Woods, Primary Care Development Officer for Galway and Roscommon; Dr Aidan Flynn, Consultant Cardiologist at Portiuncula University Hospital; and Catherine Nolan, candidate Advanced Nurse Practitioner.

RCSI Critical Care Conference Award for UHG

Yvonne Fehily who is an ANP with the Critical Care Outreach Team in UHG received an award for Best Research Study and Best Presentation at the recent RCSI Critical Care Conference for her study 'Do Critical Care Outreach Teams Improve Patient Outcomes?'

Since the introduction of the Critical Care Outreach Team at the hospital in 2016, there has been a reduction in readmission rates to ICU/HDU, a reduction in cardiac arrest calls and a decrease in hospital mortality rates.

The Critical Care Outreach Team currently comprises five ANPs and provides an 8am to 8pm weekday service and 24 hour cover at the weekend where their role is to assess and treat deteriorating patients on the ward with a view to try and prevent an ICU admission or if the patient is for critical care admission that it is done so in a timely fashion. If there is a delay in accessing the critical care bed the ANP can stay with the patient and start treatment on the ward until the bed becomes available. Therefore, supportive therapy is not delayed resulting in better patient outcomes.

The Critical Care Outreach Team (CCOT) also respond as part of the Cardiac Arrest Team, follow up all patients discharged from critical care and support and facilitate the weaning of tracheostomy patients. The CCOT also provide support and education to ward staff.



Yvonne Fehily, ANP with the Critical Care Outreach Team at UHG with her awards for Best Research Study and Best Presentation at the RCSI Critical Care Conference in March.

New COVID-19 Assessment Unit at MUH

The new Acute COVID-19 Assessment Unit, which opened in December, was an important milestone in the delivery of safe and timely care at the hospital and has improved access to services for patients with COVID-19 or suspected of having COVID-19. The unit comprises 7 individual patient rooms with computerised facilities in each room and a dedicated office space for staff with facilities to assess patients efficiently and effectively including the ability to view x-rays taken in the unit.

Dr Jason Horan, Associate Clinical Director in Medicine and Emergency Medicine said, "Each patient is admitted to an isolation room for their initial assessment. By separating patients into individual rooms we can protect both our patients and staff. This was not possible previously and the provision of these rooms is an important development that will further enhance patient care at Mayo University Hospital.

"The proximity to the existing Emergency Department allows rapid access to critical care resources, which would not be easily available elsewhere on the campus. Streaming of all emergency cases at the front door is an important safety measure but it is equally important that all patients can quickly get access to the emergency care facilities and staff that they require.

"The unit now provides the service which was originally established as ED-B in the main hospital's Acute Medical Assessment Unit following the first phase of COVID-19. The staff who worked in ED-B developed extensive experience and skill in managing patients initially presenting with COVID-19 and they are delighted with the facilities and layout of the new building." For more click [here](#).



Staff in the new Acute Covid Assessment Unit at MUH.

PUH staff go a step above and beyond



Staff at Portiuncula University Hospital took part in a national HSE 'Steps to Health' challenge at the end of 2020 and clocked an impressive 125,405,551 steps over five weeks.

Mairead Burke who works in the hospital's IT Department was one of the coordinators for the challenge in the hospital. She said, "We were delighted with the response to the steps challenge in the hospital this year. We had 29 teams taking part with and 275 staff participated. Each team had a leader who submitted their team's weekly totals and nominated a 'person of the week' who was eligible for a prize.

Maeve Holmes from the Steps Committee added, "Our aim was to support staff to walk more and generate a sense of enjoyment, competition and motivation to keep enthusiasm levels up. It was great to see the fun and rivalry between departments and even between teams within a department.

"Staff could accumulate steps in many ways including taking the stairs instead of the lift, going for a walk during breaks and after work. The amazing Dunlo Recreational Park opposite the hospital was a hive of activity during lunchtime breaks.

"The winning team was from the Paediatric Department 'Young Offenders' who registered a total of 6,634,134 steps. Their colleagues in the same department 'Cosa Mor' took second place and the third placed team was called 'Login and Jog Out' from the IT Department. We commissioned an honorary trophy for the winning team who will keep it for the year ahead and then attempt to defend their title next year!

"We also had some success in the HSE national step challenge which had teams from hospitals and community health services around the country taking part. The team from St John's Ward won a prize for their team name 'Enema of the State' and the teams from the Special Care Baby Unit and the multi-disciplinary team won prizes for their dance routines."

Colin from the Viagra Falls, Pharmacy Team said, "We are still seeing the benefits of the challenge."



Participants in this year's Step Challenge at PUH; 275 staff on 29 teams walked a total of 125,405,551 steps during the 5 week challenge.

Development of the COVID-19 Testing Clinic at GUH

How It Started

As COVID-19 appeared in Ireland in early 2020, protection of hospital capacity, activity and staff was highlighted as a key priority. Staff screening for those referred from the Occupational Health department was key to ensure timely turnaround of test results thereby maximising available staffing levels. The staff at the Infectious Diseases Clinic (Dr Catherine Fleming, lead) volunteered for this role. As scheduled care recommenced at Galway University Hospitals in May 2020, it became clear that patients would require pre-admission screening for COVID-19 infection. Again, the Infectious Disease Clinic staff adapted and took on this task with much of the required resources in the pipeline but not yet in place.



How It Progressed

Since March 2020 the COVID screening and swabbing teams have kept hospitals open by ensuring safe surgery, safe birthing and safe screening of staff who may have been exposed to COVID-19. However, by October 2020, staff were struggling to cope with the demand as well as late nights spent managing results. At this time the swabbing clinic were performing approximately 300 swabs per week with some difficulty. However, despite demands, no scheduled procedures were cancelled due to unavailability preadmission COVID tests.

At this time the Saolta Academic office was approached for support to redesign the service and a project team was initiated with representatives from relevant disciplines including Margaret Scarry (nursing), Lorraine Keane (administration) and Joanna Freeman (medicine), as well as Peter Kidd (pharmacy and healthcare systems engineer) and Dr David Gallagher, Infectious Diseases). The aim of the project was to create resilience in the system so that increased demand could be safely facilitated. In late December, significantly increased demand became a reality with high levels of staff requiring timely COVID testing. Significant changes to the process and environment were proposed by team members and paid dividends after implementation, enabling capacity for more than 900 requests per week at peak. Some of the changes were relatively straight-forward but it was the systems approach that enabled the team to have those conversations and make it happen. A notable change was to facilitate a 'walk-in' clinic for staff members, thereby eliminating barriers to accessing testing and maximising available staffing levels.

How's It Going?

As we emerge from the 'third wave' and restart urgent scheduled procedures, demand on the COVID screening and testing services will significantly increase once more. We also need to be vigilant for infections among staff members despite excellent COVID vaccination uptake rates. The restated aim is to build in resilience to a system that will need to accommodate increased numbers for testing as well as a predicted higher proportion of patients returning positive tests. We are planning and evolving towards a nursing-delivered service with increased collaboration with our colleagues in the COVID Screening Department, Occupational Health Department, as well as the Peri-Operative Directorate. It is also important to highlight that the Virology Laboratory (Dr Una Ni Riain, Maria Molly, Belinda Hanahoe) uncomplainingly kept pace with the clinic workload without compromising quality or turnaround times. Furthermore, a collaboration with Richard Malone (Information Services) will provide a single reference dataset from time of referral through to result management thereby greatly improving efficiency and accuracy whilst removing unnecessary administration steps. We expect a doubling in demand for elective swabs until rates in our community decline and with this will come a continued pressure to review our process with safety, flow and productivity in mind.

Dr David Gallagher, Infectious Diseases Department

The new and improved Helipad at SUH

Sligo University Hospital has completed construction on a new and improved helipad on site, at a cost of €300,000.

The Air Corps 112 Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS) and the Irish Coastguard Helicopter Rescue 118 carried out the first test landings on the new helipad in February and further safety checks and test landings were completed before the helipad became fully operational in March.

Dr Michael Sweeney, Consultant in Emergency Medicine said, "Sligo University Hospital serves a large catchment area, which includes many areas which can take a long time to reach by road. Our colleagues in the National Ambulance Service utilise the Irish Air Corps and the Irish Coastguard Service for air support."

Click [here](#) for more.



Photo courtesy of the Irish Air Corps.

New 50 bed ward at PUH progresses to next stage



The development of a new 50 bed ward block at Portiuncula University Hospital has progressed to the next phase and a shortlisting process is ongoing to identify suitably qualified building contractors. Contractor selection closed on 25 March and tenders will be issued shortly to the shortlisted panel.

Alongside this contract, important construction works which will enable the development of the new building are nearing completion. The new ward block is part of major capital scheme for the Hospital and represents significant investment in healthcare infrastructure for the communities of East Galway, Roscommon, the Midlands and the Mid-West. Click [here](#) for more.

LUH introduces virtual tour of the Maternity Unit

Letterkenny University Hospital has filmed a virtual tour of the Maternity Unit which is now available to view online [here](#).

The aim of the tour is to allow expectant mothers and partners/family members to view the interior of the Maternity Unit and hear staff talk about maternity services.

Evelyn Smith, Director of Midwifery at Letterkenny University Hospital said, "Unfortunately it is not possible for women and their birthing partners to tour the maternity unit in advance of giving birth at the moment due to the need to reduce footfall as part of our infection and prevention precautions for COVID-19.

"We know how important it is to be as prepared as possible for this life-changing event so we have worked with our colleagues in the Nursing and Midwifery Planning and Development Unit to put together a virtual tour of the maternity unit." Click [here](#) for more.



Geraldine Hanley, Clinical Midwife Manager at LUH.

An Taoiseach visits the Galway Vaccination Centre

An Taoiseach Micheál Martin visited the Ballybrit Racecourse vaccination centre on 05 March where he met the vaccination team who were providing the COVID-19 vaccine to healthcare workers at that time.

Afterwards he tweeted:



The Teen Parents Support Programme Galway

The Social Work Department at UHG manages a support service for young parents called the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) Galway. The TPSP Galway provides services for young people who are pregnant at age 19 years and under and the service supports them until their children are two years of age.

The support is provided to all young parents living within Galway City and County. The service is free and confidential.

A very kind lady called Irene Nel living in Tuam has donated beautiful cardigans, hats and blankets to the Teen Parents Support programme. The wool for making the knitted garments was donated to Irene during the COVID lockdown and it has kept her very busy and active during this time. We are very grateful to everyone who donated the wool to Irene and for her skill and thoughtfulness in making such beautiful items.

Parents have been delighted to receive such lovely gifts for their babies.



Remembrance Service at PUH

Traditionally the Annual Service of Remembrance for babies and children is held at Portiuncula University Hospital on the first Monday in February.

This year due to the current restrictions, a small group of staff held a service in the Hospital Chapel on that day in memory of all the precious babies and children who will never be forgotten.

Later in the year, staff at the hospital hope to hold the Annual Remembrance Service which may be online or pre-recorded.



Lanesboro Triathlon Club donation to RUH

Sincere thank you to Lanesboro Triathlon Club who recently raised €7,690 and donated it to Roscommon University Hospital to purchase new televisions for patient rooms and upgrade the television system to provide an additional range of channels.

Mary Garvey, Hospital Manager said, "We are very grateful to Lanesboro Triathlon Club for their generous donation which has enabled us to upgrade the TV system in the hospital in order to provide our patients with as much comfort as possible during their stay with us in Roscommon University Hospital.

From left: Shane Healy, Lanesboro Triathlon Club; Helen Treacy, General Manager's Office; Mary Garvey, Hospital Manager; Catherine Hanley, Lanesboro Triathlon Club and Kate Donlon, Lanesboro Triathlon Club & Frailty Team, Roscommon University Hospital.



#OurPeople

Name: Noreen Harrington

Job Title: Registered Advanced Practitioner

Location: Our Lady's Hospital, Manorhamilton

How did you get interested in the role of Rheumatology Registered Advanced Nurse Practitioner?

I completed my general nursing training in 1992 in the Whittington Hospital, London. Post registration I progressed to ward management specialising in Medical, Respiratory and Rheumatology care. I relocated to Ireland in 1999 and took up a post in the North West Regional Rheumatology unit in Manorhamilton. I completed the Postgraduate Diploma in Rheumatology Nursing in 2009 in UCD and my MSc in Research in NUI Galway in 2010.

I registered as a Nurse Prescriber in medicinal products in 2011 and completed the X-ray (Ionising Radiation) course in UCD in 2013. Finally I completed an articular joint injection course in Keele University and UCD to enable me to work as an autonomous practitioner. I formally registered as an RANP Rheumatology in April 2014.

What is a typical day?

The clients included in my caseload are individuals who are newly diagnosed with inflammatory arthritis - rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis and undifferentiated arthritis. The main aim is to achieve early remission of disease activity thus preventing irreversible joint destruction, maintain physical function and prevent associated co-morbidities.

My typical day revolves around educating new patients who are referred from the consultants on their diagnosis, medications, lifestyle, associated co-morbidities and risk factors. I follow up patients 6 weekly on a treat to target programme until disease control is achieved.

I prescribe steroid therapies to settle disease flares and taper steroids accordingly; I escalate disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs to achieve disease remission. Ordering and interpreting laboratory examinations and x-rays is a big part of treatment due to the nature of the disease and medications and screening of secondary co-morbidities.

If you had to describe your job in three words... or one sentence... what would it be?
Aim to achieve early disease remission in new onset arthritis for best long term outcome.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Due to advances in rheumatology treatments patients generally do very well. It is very rewarding to hear patient say they have their life back.

We are very fortunate to live in a country that has not restricted use of the best treatments for our patients despite the financial implications.



'Thinking of You' at GUH



From left, Miriam Conry, Medical Social Worker; Catherine Scully, Medical Social Worker; Donal Gill, Principal Social Worker; Geraldine McEleney, Senior Medical Social Worker.

In February the Social Work Department at Galway University Hospitals introduced a new initiative inviting family and friends of patients in the hospital to email a letter, photo which is printed, placed in an envelope and delivered to their loved one in hospital.

Staff Engagement and Staff Wellbeing

Healthcare staff appreciate that effective patient and family engagement is crucial when providing a quality health care service, but this does not happen without effective staff engagement, they are two sides of the same coin and worth equal attention by healthcare organisations and their leaders.

The Saolta University Health Care Group has a dedicated staff member working to support staff in the area of engagement and wellbeing. Elaine Fallon was appointed Saolta Group Lead for Staff Engagement and Staff Wellbeing in February 2019, and has been working with staff to identify areas for improvement and focus on solutions, which can be implemented by local management. To date, Elaine has been working with General Managers, Directors of Nursing and Midwifery, Human Resource Managers and other senior management who have identified the need for support for staff engagement and/or staff wellbeing.

The privilege of working with frontline staff in the organisation has highlighted what is working well within the different teams and, what is not working well, which includes the issues that staff face whilst at work. Conversations have also involved identifying personal values and exploring how these may be aligned to the values in each local and the regional healthcare organisation.

Staff at all levels have shared their concerns in relation to the importance of listening to their feedback, their involvement in decisions that affect services and the delivery of care and, in recognising, acknowledging their significant contribution to healthcare.

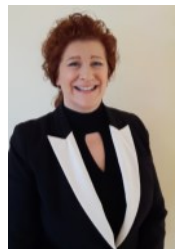
It is abundantly clear that our healthcare staff are all trying their best to deliver high quality care to their patients, but in the process, are experiencing very high levels of anxiety, stress, fatigue and burn-out. COVID-19 has created huge challenges for staff, in addition to the issues they had already identified.

The significance of engaging with staff through collaboration, effective two-way communication, involvement in healthcare decisions and demonstrating sincere appreciation cannot be underestimated. It has been humbling to observe the way staff get on with their jobs, being the best they can be in really difficult circumstances, often putting themselves and their own families last in order to continue in their working roles. There is a premise that adversity makes people stronger, but we must maintain our focus on how to best support our staff going forwards.

Some of the initiatives I am working on introducing within the Saolta Group are: 'Having Difficult Conversations' and 'Psychological Safety in Staff Teams'.

In Saolta, we believe our staff are a precious resource, we would not be able to deliver the healthcare services without them, so we will continue to be proactive in supporting them, continue listening to their feedback, involving them in decisions around service delivery and care, and, demonstrating how much they are valued in our hospitals.

Contact details: Elaine.fallon@hse.ie; 086 049 0528



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