

Dáil Éireann - Volume 631 - 07 February, 2007 Health Service Reform: Motion (Resumed).

Mr. J. Breen: Week in, week out the appalling state of the health service is debated in the House. The Government's only defence is to inundate Deputies with statistics, hoping that the real truth will be lost among the dross. Every week the Taoiseach comes to the House and waffles about all the money being spent on the health service. If he referred to large sums of money being squandered on the health service, people would believe him.

Mr. Mulcahy: Where is money being squandered?

Mr. J. Breen: Does the Deputy believe there are no waiting lists for operations or beds, or that operations are not being cancelled? Is no one waiting for a consultant's appointment? Last week, a constituent of mine who suffers from severe diabetes was sent to Limerick Regional Hospital to see a neurologist before being sent home without being seen. Limerick Regional Hospital does not have a neurologist which means one must come from County Kerry two days every month to serve the mid-west region. Is this the health service of which we are proud?

We have endured a long saga with Ennis General Hospital. Before the 2002 general election, the then Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Martin, stated on a visit to my constituency that an upgraded hospital was so far advanced in the planning and design stages that it would shortly be advertised for tender in the European journal. The four Oireachtas Members from the Government side met the Taoiseach about 18 months ago without asking me or my namesake, Deputy Pat Breen, to accompany them because they wanted to deliver an upgraded hospital in Ennis on their own. What happened after the meeting? The Members hurried home because the Taoiseach instilled in them such confidence about the project that they were afraid it would commence before they arrived in Ennis, with the result that they would not have an opportunity to announce it on Clare

FM or in *The Clare Champion*. Nothing has happened since. We were informed by a Senator that the Minister assured him the team would proceed to the tender and planning stages in July 2006. The date was changed first to late October 2006.

It is now early spring of 2007. When will Ennis General Hospital be upgraded? The election will be long over but I am hopeful I will be here to see the project delivered.

We do not want any more waffle from the Minister or the Taoiseach. The truth is not being told in the House. The Government has tried to hoodwink people. East Clare does not have a 24-hour accident and emergency service and Loop Head, 60 miles from Ennis, does not have an air helicopter service. We have been promised both services. While this is grand on paper when will we see them in reality? Is it surprising that the people of County Clare have lost confidence in the Government? When will Ennis General Hospital be upgraded? Will the Hanly report be implemented? Will Ennis retain its 24-hour doctor-led accident and emergency service? I doubt it. The Government has failed the people, including the people of County Clare. They will continue to fail while in power but, hopefully, we will be on the Government benches after the election and we will bang them out of the place.

Dáil Éireann - Volume 630 - 31 January, 2007 **Private Members' Business. - Cancer Services: Motion.**

Mr. J. Breen: Deputy Joe Higgins referred to the case of Rosie in Kilkenny. This is a tragic, disturbing and shameful case. After Rosie told her story on Joe Duffy's "Liveline", the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, stated on "Questions and Answers" that hers was a once-off case. Unfortunately, however, her situation is replicated throughout the State; I am aware of three similar cases. The Minister's comment is typical of the arrogance, insensitivity and ineptitude of the Government.

Every year there are national campaigns to reduce road deaths, and we recognise that they are required. It is only recently, however, that we have seen anything close to a cancer awareness programme. This is despite the fact that the number who die annually from cancer is greater than the combined figure for road fatalities, murders and manslaughters.

In 1992, the then Minister for Health set up a committee to review cervical cancer services. Fifteen years later, we still await a national roll-out of this programme. Instead of measuring the cost of delivering such a scheme, it is time to focus on how many lives will be saved as a result of an immediate roll-out. Early diagnosis is the most important factor in treating and curing cancer, yet the Government's plan to extend radiotherapy services is already two years behind schedule and will not be implemented until 2013 at the earliest.

Between 40 and 50 women die every year because of a lack of screening services for cervical cancer. Approximately 650 to 700 die annually from breast cancer. Like cervical cancer screening services, the BreastCheck facility is not a national service. We have all heard the announcements urging women to avail of the service if they are under the age of 65. How dare the Minister endorse this age limit when research abroad shows that at least two thirds of all breast cancer cases occur in women over 65. However, the Government precludes women over 65 from availing of the BreastCheck programme. I do not know why people accept this position. Another significant factor in breast and colorectal cancer is obesity. Over the past ten years, since this Government has been in office, the rate of obesity in this country has doubled. We await the promised national diet and fitness programme specifically aimed at our children. Perhaps the penny will drop with the Minister that spending adequate money now on proper national screening and awareness and information programmes will reduce the cost of treatment in the long term.

The announcement that St. Luke's Hospital in Dublin is to close brought about a concerted campaign to change that decision. St. Luke's Hospital should remain open and another hospital should open to alleviate the situation. I have received letters from all over the country in this regard which only proves the hardship people suffer having to travel to receive treatment. Last summer, a Clare man travelled to Dublin to get treatment for cancer. He met a man who had travelled from Donegal for treatment in the waiting room. Both of those men left Dublin and returned home without having received treatment because a scanner was not working. As I said, I do not understand why there has not been outrage and protest on a scale never seen before. No one should have to tolerate a fraction of what is happening in our health service.

We should not forget that the Minister sought out this position. She was going to sort out our crumbling health service once and for all. Instead of a crumbling health service, we now have a system that has been torn asunder. However, no one accepts responsibility for it because everything is a matter for the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. The HSE is the most inept, malfunctioning and faceless organisation established by an equally inept and malfunctioning Minister.