

## **Western Trust position and decision on the change to Emergency General Surgery**

The temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at SWAH was implemented in December 2022 as an 'Emergency Measure' due to significant and ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining the required consultant workforce, which meant that there were NO substantive Consultant General Surgeons available to work on the emergency rota at the hospital.

The Trust was unable to maintain a safe and sustainable emergency general surgery rota at SWAH following the resignation of the only remaining substantive Consultant General Surgeon at the hospital.

In this context, the Trust Board met on 17 November 2022 and approved a recommendation for an unplanned temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at SWAH in order to ensure patient safety. This decision was taken in response to immediate operational risk and was not a decision on the permanent configuration of services.

This position was further influenced by the introduction of revised **Emergency General Surgery Safety Standards** by the **Department of Health in June 2022**.

### **Public Consultation for Temporary Change to Emergency General Surgery**

In line with its statutory obligations and the Department of Health Guidance on *Change or Withdrawal of Services*, the Trust launched a 12-week public consultation on the temporary change to Emergency General Surgery at SWAH in the week **commencing 16 January 2023**.

The consultation process was carried out fully in accordance with:

- The Department of Health Circular on *Change or Withdrawal of Services*; and
- The Trust's approved Consultation Scheme.

An extensive and wide-ranging programme of engagement was undertaken, including:

- Seven face-to-face public consultation events;
- Two online consultation events;
- Dedicated staff engagement and information sessions.

As required under the guidance, the consultation explicitly sought to explore viable alternatives to the temporary service arrangements. The Trust is satisfied that this

requirement was met and that the consultation process was robust, transparent, and comprehensive. The Findings Report from this consultation was formally presented to the Trust Board at its public meeting on 6 July 2023.

Trust Board approved the decision to proceed with a 'Public Consultation on a permanent change to Emergency General Surgery' in June 2025, but the Trust did not proceed with this in July 2025. This decision followed a request from the Health Minister to pause that consultation and begin the process of producing a vision plan, emphasising how the South West Acute Hospital will meet the health needs of its current and future population.

On 7 October 2025, the Trust Board formally agreed to close the Public Consultation and also approved the start of new work to design and develop a Vision Plan. This will be a forward-looking programme that will focus on the people and places of Fermanagh and West Tyrone. As requested by so many people and partners, including elected Representatives, this plan will need a meaningful period of engagement and listening sessions and will include specific work relating to the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH). Further details will be provided as this programme progresses on the Information Online Hub – link at end.

**Chief Executive, Neil Guckian, commented:**

*"The Trust recognises that the previous EGS consultation did not meet expectations, and we are committed to significantly improving how we engage. The Trust Board has now directed the development of a new vision for Health and Care Futures in Fermanagh and West Tyrone, with SWAH playing a central and important role within that vision."*

He added that this work will reflect the specific health needs of the population - including rurality, ageing demographic trends, and the vital importance of strong community and primary care services - while also exploring further opportunities through cross-border partnerships.

Despite incorrect information recently stated in public on some platforms, at no point during the consultation process had the Trust taken a decision on a permanent change to Emergency General Surgery at SWAH. The consultation was undertaken in good faith, in line with statutory requirements, in order to gather information from the public on their views and concerns about the impact of the change to help inform future decision-making.

## **Clinical Standards and Patient Safety**

The Trust is now fully compliant with the revised Emergency General Surgery standards introduced in June 2022. These standards were designed to ensure that patients across

Northern Ireland receive safe, specialist emergency surgical care, regardless of where they live.

Compliance has required significant transformation of the Trust's consultant workforce and the establishment of a 24/7 upper gastrointestinal bleeding pathway.

All Trusts in Northern Ireland participate in independent benchmarking through CHKS, which analyses clinical data to assess outcomes including mortality, complications, readmissions, efficiency, safety, and quality.

This independent clinical data shows that patient outcomes have improved since the temporary service change in 2022, based on that analysis by Caspe Healthcare Knowledge Systems (CHKS), which benchmarks all Trusts in Northern Ireland, and shows:

- Mortality has reduced by approximately 14%;
- Complications have reduced by approximately 21%;
- Readmissions have reduced by approximately 22%.

**These improvements indicate safer care and improved recovery outcomes for patients across the Western Trust area.**

*"These improvements mean that patients across the Western Trust, wherever they live, now have a better chance of survival and better recovery outcomes,"*  
Mr Neil Guckian, Chief Executive.

## **Trust's position on the question of Re-instating Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital**

Delivering Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital would require full compliance with the Department of Health revised Emergency General Surgery standards. This means that the previous commissioned service could not be re-instated and means that a different service would now be required.

This would necessitate significant additional investment, including Interventional radiology, renal services and an accredited bleeding rota. Such services have not been commissioned for SWAH.

### **Department of Health Official Statement:**

"The [Review of General Surgery NI](#) sets out evidence-based standards for Emergency General Surgery (EGS) and hospitals delivering EGS must meet these standards.

In considering the future model for general surgery across the Western Health & Social Care Trust (WHST), the Trust must follow the Guidance on the Change and Withdrawal of Services. Any decision on a permanent change to the delivery of EGS at SWAH will require approval from the Department.

SWAH remains an important Acute Hospital within the NI hospital network, and the Minister and Department share the Trust's commitment to the long-term sustainability and development of SWAH as a vital and successful hospital within the HSC regional network of hospitals."

## **Progress of Ambulatory Pathways ensures that over two thirds of patients presenting for emergency general surgery remain in SWAH**

A significant number of patients are now safely treated each year through ambulatory pathways at SWAH and Altnagelvin, with over 5 patients per day presenting at SWAH receiving same-day or next-day assessment and treatment, and 2.5 patients per day transferred for inpatient care and treatment to Altnagelvin Hospital.

## **Important FACTS in respect of South West Acute Hospital**

SWAH remains an important Acute Hospital within the Northern Ireland hospital network and its acute services provision has not changed. SWAH provides a 24/7 Type 1 Emergency Department, maternity services (Obstetrics and Gynaecology), full resuscitation facilities and Intensive Care Unit.

The Trust is also committed to contributing fully, where appropriate, to cross-border collaboration including, through partnership work already underway with Saolta and CAWT on cross-border issues.

### **We are committed to:**

- **Keeping SWAH a vital and sustainable acute hospital**
- **Open and transparent engagement with the public and stakeholders**
- **Developing a meaningful long-term vision for health and care in the area**

A comprehensive communications and engagement programme is being developed at present to ensure people have clear, factual information about services and future plans.

The Trust has already had a significant number of engagements with stakeholders. This includes a staff engagement programme, communication and a range of engagements and meetings with MLAs, MPs, Council and some Stakeholder Groups who contacted the Trust to voice their concerns, including the Fermanagh Business Leaders Group. These engagements will continue and expand throughout January, February and March 2026. In addition the Trust had a series of correspondence with local pressure group, SOAS, in an attempt to engage and while the initial planned meeting was cancelled at SOAS' request, the Trust is hopeful that discussions can proceed moving forward.

Details of these engagements and updates on the ongoing work will be shared through the Western Trust website online hub:

- [Fermanagh and West Tyrone Future Health and Care Services | Western Health & Social Care Trust](#)

## January 2026: Understanding Emergency General Surgery Change Timeline of Information.

**June 2022:** The Department of Health release the [Review of General Surgery NI](#) setting out the new evidence-based standards for Emergency General Surgery (EGS) and stating that hospitals delivering EGS must meet these standards.

**From October 2022:** Over the period of this timeline (October 2022 – January 2026), at regular and consistent intervals, full updates provided to Programme Board and Trust Board to keep members fully informed and apprised of all information.

**November 2022:** The Trust was unable to maintain a safe and sustainable emergency general surgery rota at SWAH following the resignation of the only remaining substantive Consultant General Surgeon available to work on the emergency rota at the hospital.

Trust Board met on 17 November 2022 and approved a recommendation for an unplanned temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at SWAH in order to ensure patient safety. This decision was taken in response to immediate operational risk and was not a decision on the permanent configuration of services.

**December 2022:** The temporary suspension of Emergency General Surgery at SWAH was implemented in December 2022, following the decision by Trust Board.

**January 2023:** In line with its statutory obligations and the Department of Health Guidance on *Change or Withdrawal of Services*, the Trust launched a 12-week public consultation on the temporary change to Emergency General Surgery at SWAH in the week **commencing on 16 January 2023**.

### *The list of Consultation Events are as follows:*

DEA	Venue	AVAILABLE DATES
Enniskillen	Fermanagh Lakeland Forum	30th Jan 6.30pm - 8.30pm
Erne East	Castle Park Leisure Centre Anne	31st Jan 6.30pm to 8.30pm
West Tyrone	Ecclesville Centre	1st Feb 6.30pm to 8.30pm
Erne North	Bawnacre Centre Anne	2nd Feb 6.30pm to 8.30pm
Erne West	Belcoo Community Centre anne	7th Feb 6.30pm to 8.30pm
Mid Tyrone	Owenkillew Centre	8th Feb 6.30pm to 8.30pm
Omagh	Omagh Leisure Complex	9th Feb 6.30pm to 8.30pm
Online	Zoom webinar	8 March 1pm to 3pm
Online	Zoom webinar	13 March 7pm to 9pm

- July 2023:** The Findings Report from this Public Consultation on the temporary change to Emergency General Surgery at SWAH was formally presented to the Trust Board at its public meeting on 6 July 2023. As required under the guidance, the consultation explicitly sought to explore viable alternatives to the temporary service arrangements. The Trust is satisfied that this requirement was met and that the consultation process was robust, transparent, and comprehensive.
- June 2025:** Trust Board approve the decision to proceed to a *‘Public Consultation on a permanent change to Emergency General Surgery’*.
- July 2025:** The Trust did not proceed with a planned *‘Public Consultation on a permanent change to Emergency General Surgery’* in July 2025 following a request from the Health Minister to pause that consultation and begin the process of producing a vision plan, emphasising how the South West Acute Hospital will meet the health needs of its current and future population.
- October 2025:** On 7 October 2025, the Trust Board formally agreed to close the Public Consultation and also approved the start of new work to design and develop a Vision Plan. This will be a forward-looking programme that will focus on the people and places of Fermanagh and West Tyrone. As requested by so many people and partners, including elected Representatives, this plan will need a meaningful period of engagement and listening sessions and will include specific work relating to the South West Acute Hospital (SWAH).
- February 2026:** The Trust are providing a full update to the Public in respect of improved patient pathways, information and data on the now established Ambulatory Surgical Care hubs in SWAH and Altnagelvin and Independent data information provided by Caspe Healthcare Knowledge Systems (CHKS), which benchmarks all Trusts in Northern Ireland, showing analysis for the period December 2022 – May 2025 indicating ‘Improved outcomes for Patients’ requiring emergency general surgery in the Trust.

More comprehensive detail and information in addition to clear ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ on all matters in relation to this topic will be available on the Western Trust Website online hub. The link is below and please note this will continue to be developed through January-March 2026:

- [Fermanagh and West Tyrone Future Health and Care Services | Western Health & Social Care Trust](#)