



Mr Seán Ó Fearghaíl TD,
Chairman,
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children,
Houses of the Oireachtas,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

8th October 2009

Dear Deputy Ó Fearghaíl,

I am writing on behalf of the Irish Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation to request the opportunity to appear at a meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children to discuss issues relating to services in Ireland's 38 cardiac rehab centres.

We would particularly wish to discuss the life-saving and quality of life benefits of cardiac rehab, along with its significant economic benefits, against the background of cutbacks across the health service.

Cardiovascular disease is the most common cause of death in Ireland, resulting in approximately 10,000 deaths each year. Robust international clinical trial evidence shows that cardiac rehab is directly responsible for reducing cardiac and all cause mortality by 26%. If all eligible patients in Ireland received cardiac rehab, some 2,300 lives could be saved each year.

Even before the downturn, the life-saving potential of cardiac rehab was far from being maximised with less than 50% of eligible patients actually receiving the service. In the last 12 months the situation has deteriorated rapidly even from this point with the imposition of staff cuts in 34% of centres countrywide. It is important to stress that this is not the result of any policy decision, rather that rehab staff are being assigned to cover other duties due to the health service recruitment embargo and other cutbacks.

In addition to avoidable death, the effect of these cuts is also having a major impact on levels of avoidable disability for some 9,000 patients whose physical, psychological and vocational needs should be met by the service each year. But despite the immense human cost of severely diminished services, it is highly questionable as to whether there is any economic benefit accruing from these staff cutbacks given the significant impact of cardiac rehab in reducing hospital readmission and assisting many patients – including a member of your own committee – to return to the workforce.

The Irish Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation (IACR) believes it has become crucial to highlight the effects of what are essentially under-the-radar cutbacks in an area of healthcare which doesn't get many headlines, but plays a life-changing as well as a life-saving role for thousands of people in this country each year. We would therefore be very grateful for the chance to speak to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on this issue.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Charles

President, Irish Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation

Irish Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation,

National Co-ordinator: Barbra Dalton – 086- 8733847 E: bdalton@irishheart.ie W: www.iacr.info

