

Written Ministerial Statement

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Health, Social Services and Public Safety

NORTHERN IRELAND TRAUMA NETWORK AND HEMS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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Mr Hamilton (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Members will be aware of my Department's policy proposal, set out in Transforming Your Care (TYC) to establish a regional network for major trauma in Northern Ireland.

While major trauma cases are relatively small in Northern Ireland, due to our population size, major trauma has, however, historically been the single biggest potential cause of death of people under 35 years of age. I want to provide our citizens who experience a major trauma with the best possible service to improve their chances of survival. To achieve this, I believe that the time is right to transform our major trauma services. The development of the new Critical Care Building at the Royal Victoria Hospital and the supportive public debate on the need for a Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) provides the opportunity for this.

I am therefore announcing today my commitment to further strengthen our existing high quality trauma services by enabling clinicians to take this service to the next level. This commitment involves the establishment of the Northern Ireland Trauma Network, with recurrent investment of £211,000 to operate the Network, and plans to move forward with a HEMS as a key component of the network.

The Regional Network will further develop the Royal Victoria Hospital as the centre of Northern Ireland's major trauma service working within a strong network of acute hospitals across the region. Protocol dictates that patients should be transferred to the Royal Victoria Hospital directly, provided they are able to withstand the journey. If a patient is not able for the journey, they are taken to the nearest major acute hospital within the network with the intention of transferring them to the Royal Victoria Hospital when they are able.

Speed of patient transport to the specialist centre is therefore a key requirement for an effective trauma network and I want to also take this to the next level. I am therefore announcing today my commitment to the establishment of a Northern Ireland HEMS as a key component of the Trauma Network. The exact HEMS model will be determined following the outcome of a public consultation to be undertaken by my Department on key issues related to the development of the HEMS.

The key issues covered by the consultation will include service configuration, target patient groups, home base location and funding models.

I will launch the public consultation document later this month and would ask everyone with an interest in HEMS to respond with their views.

The estimated cost for a HEMS is £2.38m for initial infrastructure and £1.8m annual recurrent operating costs. Given the difficult financial climate for the health service with many competing priorities for funding we will need to establish if it is possible to secure a robust and recurrent

charitable funding contribution for this service. I therefore welcome the recent approaches from potential charitable sources who potentially could raise funds and provide other support.

To conclude, I believe that my announcements today hold the prospect of implementing the vision for major trauma services which the late Dr John Hinds, and his colleagues, have highlighted. I want to pay tribute to all our trauma clinicians, nurses, paramedics and support staff for the exemplary service that they provide in striving to save lives. My mission is to support and enable them to continue their sterling work and I look forward to the delivery of these enhanced services in the months ahead.