



Guarded welcome from boards' CEOs

Reaction: health board chief executives

JOE HUMPHREYS

The chief executives of the State's health boards have given a guarded welcome to the health sector reforms announced yesterday.

But they said the measures must be accompanied by greater resources if patients are to benefit.

Describing current health services as "underfunded", the CEOs remarked: "Today's announcement represents the first step to what we hope will be a fundamental improvement of services to clients and patients.

"This has to be accompanied, however, by the improvements and investment in beds and capacity generally together with the restructuring of the consultants' contracts in order to achieve benefit for patients and greater job satisfaction for staff."

In a collective statement, the chief executives said they were "pleased to note" the publication of the Prospectus and Brennan reports and the adoption by the Government of elements of them, despite the fact that they recommended the abolition of the existing health board structures.

"Our overriding concern is to ensure that patients and users of our health services will benefit from the new changes and that the overall health and wellbeing of our population will improve."

Denying claims of a crisis in the health service, they claimed "the present system is functioning well, as it was designed".

As well as delivering "better, safer and more effective treatments to an ever increasing number of people", the health services in Ireland are fortunate in having a workforce "as good as the best in the world".

However, they said, "there is a need for reform and modernisation to achieve better outcomes for patients and better value for money from the very considerable investment being made in our health services. The proposal to develop shared services further is particularly welcome."

The CEOs said they also agreed that policy for acute hospitals could best be determined at national level.

"The National Hospitals Office will fulfil a well-established need in that area. We strongly recommend that the proposed new structures should strive to achieve close integration of the services provided in hospitals and in the community."

Change would be "severely limited", they added, unless issues surrounding

the consultants' contracts, as identified in the Brennan report, were implemented fully.

"We welcome a much greater involvement by consultants in the management of resources. Our acute hospitals ought to be staffed by appropriately trained doctors on site at all times. The patient should have the right to see the appropriate doctor in the appropriate setting at the appropriate time."

Contesting claims by the Tánaiste, Ms Harney, yesterday that health spending in Ireland was comparatively high within Europe, the CEOs remarked that spending on the Irish health services was only 6.8 per cent of GDP compared to an EU average of 9.3 per cent and 12.9 per cent in the US.

The National Health Strategy recognised the need for 3,000 extra beds and 5,000 additional places for older people, the CEOs noted, adding: "We urge the Government to respond to the needs set out in the Health Strategy in tandem with the reforms announced today."



The Tánaiste, Ms Harney: spending on health in Ireland is comparatively high within Europe