June 1, 2025 · Issue no 10,472 · thetimes.com

RoI €4.30 · NI £4.50

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Minister orders full audit into CHI practices

Jennifer Carroll MacNeill acts within hours of receiving report alleging that sick children had treatment delayed

John Mooney Investigations Editor

A full audit of the governance and practices of Children's Health Ireland has been ordered by Jennifer Carroll MacNeill after an internal report found that a consultant financially exploited the state's waiting list management system.

Senior HSE officials will examine allegations in the unpublished report which outlined serious issues at the hospital group and included claims that the treatment of seriously ill children was delayed.

MacNeill, the health minister, ordered the audit after The Sunday Times published details of the report last weekend, prompting resignations from the CHI board and criticism of the embattled health organisation.

She only received a copy of the report, written in 2021, on Monday. Straight away she wrote to CHI as her department had been unaware of the report until this newspaper asked it to comment.

A spokeswoman for MacNeill said: "The audit aims to assess governance and equity in access to care within CHI, especially regarding the balance between public and private patient management." It will involve officials from the HSE's finance, HR and access/ integration departments.

The 2021 investigation examined a CHI hospital department and uncovered issues including potential negligence, the abuse and mismanagement of waiting lists, sharp financial practices and a toxic working culture.

It found that the patients selected for appointments were not those who had waited the longest. As such they did not qualify for appointments paid for by the National Treatment Purchase Fund, the government body that pays for public patients to receive faster healthcare.

Further disclosures from the investigation are reported in today's newspaper. These show that a group of children born with a serious and life-changing condition was cared for poorly.

The 2021 inquiry found that the CHI department did not know how many of these patients were in its care. When interviewed by the investigators, staff continually raised the failure of the hospital to provide proper care.

Responsibility for providing specialist care to one group of children, known as the orphans, remained with the department at the centre of the controversy after CHI established a centre of excellence at another hospital.

According to their families, many were denied the chance to have procedures and treatments that could have helped them to become independent adults. The families say CHI engaged in a process to "age them out" before they left paediatric heath care, allowing them to enter adulthood so the problem moved elsewhere.

Many parents wrote to the hospital but failed to get adequate responses. One parent interviewed by this paper said she was told security would remove her from the accident and emergency department if she presented with her daughter, who had been moved into adult care at 16 years of age.

CHI has not yet contacted the families in question, who may now seek legal recourse to obtain an unredacted copy of the report.

The internal inquiry also found that children placed on waiting lists by a consultant had conditions that required immediate interventions. The failure to provide procedures went against best practice and could result in infertility or cancer, the inquiry found.

This took place when there were other doctors available to manage and perform the procedures.

CHI has declined to answer specific questions about the matter but stated that "all appropriate actions" had been taken. It has not confirmed whether the matters in the report have been reported to the Irish Medical Council or the Standards in Public Office Commission. It also declined to say whether a consultant who had been confronted with the report's findings received a payment upon retiring.

The Department of Health and CHI declined to say whether attempts would be made to contact the parents involved.

Hospital unit unaware, page 6

CROWNING GLORY

Ella Browne shows off a floral head-dress at Bord Bia Bloom, the country's largest flower show, in Phoenix Park, Dublin. The celebration of gardening and sustainability continues today and tomorrow

RTE stars' tax cases could cost up to €11m

Jennifer Bray Political Editor

RTE has set aside €11 million for a potential tax and social welfare bill related to the treatment of 20 highly paid individuals, some of whom operate through limited companies and might have been wrongly classified as self-employed.

The broadcaster has so far handed over more than €4 million in unpaid social welfare contributions related to the misclassification of some workers as self-employed contractors.

RTE has set aside €22 million for costs that could arise from the review of up to 700 cases. This weekend, however, it confirmed that half of the sum relates to only 20 individuals or limited companies.

The station has mounted a High Court challenge in two cases. These are set to become "pathfinders" for the remaining disputed contracts.

That case is due for mention in the High Court this week and relates to a dispute between the Department of Social Protection and RTE over the status of people self-employed through their own companies.

According to information released last year, six of RTE's ten highest-paid presenters use companies to charge for their services.

At a meeting of the Oireachtas committee on arts and media last week, RTE disclosed that of the 655 cases reviewed as part of the bogus self-employment inquiry, some 82 per cent have been concluded. The investigation found that of those cases, 60 per cent were

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