

# 90,000 bed days lost due to hospital delays

MORE than 90,000 bed days have been lost in the hospital system so far this year because of delayed discharges.

Fianna Fáil health spokesman Billy Kelleher, who received the figures from the HSE, said the situation is 'unjustifiable'.

A bed day is a day during which a person is confined to a bed. Patients are classified as delayed discharges when they no longer need to be cared for in an acute hospital but there is no access to step down care.

'To lose over 90,000 bed days when there are over 86,000 people waiting for treatment is not only unacceptable,' Mr Kelleher said. 'From both a resource and patient care

By Claire Gorman

point of view, these lost bed days are unjustifiable.'

He added: 'On average more than 15,000 bed days were lost each month in hospitals nationwide. The number fluctuated from 13,105 in February to 16,699 in April.'

Mr Kelleher said there is 'too few step-down beds' nationwide, adding that 'home supports remain inadequate'.

He said the delayed discharges are causing people to spend time waiting on trolleys when admitted to hospital.

Last week, the Irish Patients' Association said hospital waiting list numbers, which

exceeded 686,000 last month, should be declared a crisis.

Some 686,997 people are on a waiting list, according to figures published by the National Treatment Purchase Fund.

'If a fraction of these lost days were put back into use every day through better supports for older people upon discharge, we could radically reduce the number of people lying on trolleys,' Mr Kelleher said.

St James's Hospital (10,418), Beaumont Hospital (9,156), the Mater Hospital (7,753) and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda (7,253) lost the most bed days in the first six months of this year.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# Hearing Bob's hymn brings it all back home

**T**HERE was a quite unremarkable movie released in 1973, called Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid.

It was a Western that starred James Coburn and Kris Kristofferson. It might have had no impact on the cultural register except for one remarkable moment.

The soundtrack included a song that was composed and sung by another of the film's leading actors. It appears in the middle of the movie and only lasts a couple of minutes.

It is, however, a masterpiece of modern music. The haunting opening chords are delivered with sublime delicacy:

*'Mama, take this badge off of me I can't use it any more It's getting' dark, too dark to see I feel like I'm knockin' on heaven's door'*

Bob Dylan's music is saturated with religious imagery. But this song is particularly poignant because it could well be a hymn to those who perished in the Holocaust. To read it in this way is to see the 'badge' as the yellow star, the darkness that of oblivion.

Dylan's genius is revealed not so much in his melodies, which are comparatively simple and straightforward. Rather, you find it in his lyrics which are laden with meaning and metaphor.

But in 'Knockin' On Heaven's Door, it is the combination of intense imagery wrapped in a mournful melody that renders it unforgettable.

For me, this song is a hymn of sorrow. The first time I heard it performed live was in the RDS in 1989. Dylan wore a cap covered with a hood and a pair of shades, but he sang a majestic version of Heaven's Door that left me speechless.

The last time I saw him play was in Kilkenny in 2002. Towards the end of the concert, the lights dimmed and the little troubadour sang this song as if it were an anthem to the dead. When it ended, I found that I was weeping.

Sometimes, the most meaningful moments of our lives happen in a second. It might be a song, a line of poetry, a sunrise or a kiss. But in that moment, we have a revelation of what it means to be human, to be situated on that threshold between the timeless and time.

That is how I felt that night in

Kilkenny. I knew Dylan inside out, had written a pamphlet on the mystical element in his lyrics, but nothing had prepared me for that moving moment. With passionate intensity, he sang as though heaven's door had finally opened.

That was 15 years ago and, although my respect for Dylan has never waned, my interest in his work has. Imagine, then, my surprise when, the other day, I heard our eldest singing a familiar lyric. I stopped, listened carefully and heard him croon: 'Mama, take this badge off of me.'

I have rarely spoken to my children of Bob Dylan, or about my early fascination with his work. And yet, here is a 12-year-old boy who has suddenly acquired an almost obsessive interest in Leonard Cohen and, now, Dylan. The other evening, he scoured the house in pursuit of the remnants of my past life - old Dylan albums that were buried here and there.

Until I had children, I used to believe that our personalities were nurtured by our parents and social circumstances.

I could not deny the influence of our genes, but I did not think they accounted for more than those other factors.

But now I see that I was wrong.

**S**OMETIMES, it is like watching a young me growing up all over again. Aspects of my personality which I thought I had long since suppressed, spontaneously reawaken before my eyes. It is strangely disconcerting but no less fascinating.

In the end, I gave in. Over dinner the other night, I answered all my son's questions about Dylan and we even played one of his finest albums, Time Out Of Mind. It seems that no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot get rid of my old self.

We finished dinner and my son went back to Leonard Cohen. Little did he know that he had stirred something deep within me.

In the evening shadows, I rolled back the years and found myself standing again in that field of dreams.

There, online, I discovered a familiar Dylan concert from 2002. Slowly, mournfully, he began to sing: 'Mama, take this badge...'

I then heard my son singing along as though he had known this song his whole life.

Funny enough, I now believe that he has.

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