

Hospital overcrowding sees 600 left on trolleys

ALMOST 600 patients were left on trolleys in our hospitals yesterday, figures revealed.

There were 591 people on trolleys in hospitals across the country, with 411 in emergency departments and 180 on wards, according to the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation.

Worst hit with overcrowding was Cork University Hospital, with a total of 51 patients left waiting on trolleys – 37 in the ED and 14 in wards.

A spokesperson for the South/South West Hospital Group said: 'For today's (April 10) 8am Trolley Count, Cork University Hospital reported through the Special Delivery Unit a total of 28 patients were awaiting

By Michelle O'Keeffe

admission to an inpatient bed. 'The Hospital Executive and Clinical Teams are monitoring the situation and every effort is being made to increase capacity for inpatient admissions.'

Elsewhere yesterday, University College Hospital, Galway had 43 patients on trolleys, South Tipperary General Hospital had 39, and St Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny had 38, according to the INMO.

A HSE spokesperson said that yesterday, 'emergency departments reported 444 patients on hospital trolleys awaiting admission to hospital'. They added: 'The number of patients

reported at 2pm had reduced by 24% to 336 with further reductions expected by 8pm.

'The number of patient presenting to ED has increased by 8% compared to last year and the number of patients admitted from ED has also increased by over 5% when compared to the same time last year.'

Last month was the worst March on record for patients being left waiting on trolleys.

Some 10,511 people, including 191 children, had to wait for inpatient beds, with a total of 3,112 waiting for care in one week. Another record was broken in March, when 714 people waited on trolleys in one day – the highest number ever.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

As long as we are still alive, there is hope for tomorrow

LAST week, our eldest was chosen to act in the Druid production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*. Over two nights in the Pavilion Theatre in Dún Laoghaire, he played the role of 'Boy'. In the midst of a capacity crowd, Mrs Dooley and I were like two cats who got the cream.

The production has been critically acclaimed and rightly so.

For those unacquainted with the play, it features two protagonists who pass their long days waiting for the elusive Godot. Clad in rags and bored to death, their misery is heightened by the fact that Godot never shows up.

As the Sun descends, a boy appears to the two men. He tells them that 'Mr Godot' will not be coming tonight but promises that he will arrive tomorrow. Tomorrow comes, but Mr Godot never does.

What's more, the boy seems not to recognise the two men when he emerges from the shadows each evening. This raises all the deep questions: are the men dead, lingering in some halfway world between existence and eternity? Is their 'existence' a metaphor for the absurdity of human life, where we simply live out our days with the prospect of nothing beyond the grave?

At one level, the play is comical; at another, it is dark and desolate. Our son did not lighten the mood, for his purpose is to repeatedly dash, and then to raise, the men's vain hopes. Godot is either a cruel creator or a bad joke.

Suffice to say, our son loved every second of it. However, playing the role forced him to ask what it all means. That it may mean our lives are meaningless is not something he can easily contemplate.

Waiting For Godot first appeared in 1952 – a time when the idea of 'meaninglessness' was all the rage in France, where Beckett lived for most of his adult life. The two tramps in the play have nothing to do, nowhere to go and very little of substance to say. Yes, they speak endlessly, but about their boots, hats, a tree and the length of the day.

So bleak is their existence that they often think of hanging themselves from the tree at the centre

of the stage. Saved by the dim prospect that Godot will eventually show up, they defer the tragedy until tomorrow. But then, the boy reappears, and all hope is lost – again.

Our little boy is full of faith, hope and life. Never has he had to confront the thought that it might all be for nothing. But isn't it true that many of my son's generation consider their lives meaningless and without purpose? Isn't it true that they are without even the prospect of Godot to save them from hopelessness?

As we spoke about the play, light began to eclipse the darkness. Despite the tree always tempting the tramps to end the tedium, they somehow find the courage to wait until tomorrow. Cicero said it best: 'While there's life, there's hope.'

The two men bicker and fight, but they cannot do without each other. Each helps the other to get through the endless succession of days, to persevere even when life offers nothing but hardship. It doesn't matter if they are dead or alive because, in the other, they find a reason to go on.

Beckett wrote the play in the immediate aftermath of the industrial-scale slaughter of the Second World War. It was a time when people noticed only the 'tragic sense of life'. But, even then, the hope that ordinary people placed in each other could not be extinguished.

FOR isn't it true that when life seems most hopeless, and we feel most useless, that the comfort and compassion of others save us from despair? All it takes is one person – just one – to reach out, and a life can be saved. All it takes is for us to remember what Dickens said: 'No-one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of it for anyone else.'

The tramps toil but the boy offers them only illusory hope. They persist because they find meaning in each other. They each lighten the burden of the other and life conquers death.

So many of us journey through our lives believing in their futility. But no life that has lifted the burden of even one other person can be judged futile or useless.

For that is the true work of life – the work that makes each day more than meaningful.

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