



30 June 2017

RQIA Publishes Findings of its Review of Northern Ireland's Plastic Surgery Service

Today, RQIA has published the findings of its Review of the Regional Plastic Surgery Service in Northern Ireland. Plastic surgery specialises in the repair or reconstruction of missing or damaged tissue and skin, usually resulting from surgery, illness, injury or an abnormality present at birth. This service provides treatment to people of all ages with a wide range of conditions, including cancer, congenital conditions, and injury as a result of burns or trauma. The review team examined the current context for the plastic surgery service.

Dr Lourda Geoghegan, RQIA's Medical Director, said: **"RQIA's review team found dedicated plastic surgery staff working to provide a quality treatment to patients, within the confines of a service with limited capacity."**

Dr Geoghegan continued: **"The commissioning direction for the plastic surgery service in Northern Ireland was published ten years ago. Since this time there has been a significant increase in demand arising from both cancer and trauma cases, which has impacted on capacity to deliver non-urgent elective cases. While the review team understands that a revised policy is being developed, we recommend that this is published as a matter of priority."**

RQIA's Medical Director said: **"During the review, we found that the service is unable to meet its targets for urgent referrals, and is not complying with joint orthopaedic – plastic surgery best practice standards. The review team noted that due to a shortage of trained surgeons, access to microsurgical breast reconstruction is limited."**

While the South Eastern Trust has overall responsibility for plastic surgery services in Northern Ireland, the service is currently being managed and funded separately across the Belfast and South Eastern trusts.

Dr Geoghegan concluded: “**The review team considers that in the short term Northern Ireland’s plastic surgery service needs assistance to meet increasing demand and improved opportunities for doctors in training in all aspects of plastic surgery. In the longer term, the review team calls for a single service, with recurrent funding to employ additional consultant plastic surgeons to meet the increasing demands. The development and support of strong clinical leadership alongside a clear regional policy direction will also be important to take the service forward, and ensuring a high quality service.**”

RQIA’s review team makes 10 recommendations to support improvement, which must be underpinned by clear policy direction and strong clinical leadership to take the service forward in the future.

ENDS

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RQIA’s report of this review is available at: www.rqia.org.uk from 30 June 2017.

Editors' Notes

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, established in April 2005 under *The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003*, is the independent health and social care regulatory body for Northern Ireland. In its work RQIA encourages continuous improvement in the quality and availability of health and social care services through a programme of inspections and reviews.

Review of the Regional Plastic Surgery Service in Northern Ireland, June 2017

RQIA's Review of the Regional Plastic Surgery Service in Northern Ireland was undertaken as part of RQIA’s Three Year Review Programme 2015-18. The terms of reference for this review were:

1. To describe and profile the current plastic surgery service in Northern Ireland compared to similar services in Great Britain.
2. To explore current issues for the plastic surgery service, including burns and paediatric plastic surgery.
3. To assess the effectiveness and present relevance of regional policy guidance for the provision of the plastic surgery services (*A Policy to Make Best Use of Resources in plastic surgery and Related Specialties (23 November 2006)*) to ensure people have timely access to high quality services.
4. To report on the findings, identify areas of improvement and, where appropriate, make recommendations for future plastic surgery service provision in Northern Ireland.