

"The Government also fails to recognise the value of home nebulisers, the electric inhalers which can prevent costly overnight stays in hospital for asthma patients. Correct use of this service would save money and make more beds available."

There are additional problems with the planning of expenditure. With the new financial year only weeks away, many senior figures in the Health Boards and Trusts are still not clear how much they will have to spend in the next 12 months.

NICHSA is asking that the Minister ensures that information given to the public on health spending and on waiting lists is easily understandable.

"The quality of information from the DHSS is such that it does more to confuse than enlighten", said Andrew Dougal.

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The four politicians, together with Andrew Dougal, will be available at Dundonald House from 10.45am until 11.15am.

Andrew Dougal will be available at NICHSA, 21 Dublin Road, Belfast from 11.45am.

For further information, please contact Andrew Dougal at:

- [Redacted]
- Mobile [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- Message Mail [Redacted]

Contact telephone numbers for the four MPs are as follows:

- Rev Maria Smyth - [Redacted]
- Lord Alderdice - [Redacted]
- Rev William McCrea - [Redacted]
- Dr Joe Hendron - [Redacted]

HEALTH MINISTER TO BE QUIZZED ON HEART OPERATIONS

*Embargo until Wednesday 26 February 1997*

The selling of heart surgery to patients in the Republic while people in Northern Ireland languish on a waiting list, is to be queried by the NICHA and a multi-party group of politicians when they meet Health Minister Malcolm Moss this week.

The Association's Chief Executive, Andrew Dougal, together with Alliance leader Lord Alderdice, health spokespersons Ulster Unionist MP the Rev Martin Smyth, SDLP MP Dr Joe Hendron and DUP MP Rev William McCrea, will see Mr Moss at Dundonald House at 9.45am on Wednesday 26 February 1997. The meeting was originally called to discuss Health Service funding, as well as delays in waiting times for cardiac surgery, but the revelation that the Royal Hospitals Trust is selling operations to patients south of the border will now be on the agenda.

The Royal claimed that it was forced to offer surgery to people outside Northern Ireland because the health authorities here did not have the money to pay for operations.

But the Association has evidence that while this practice is going on, some GP fundholders' requests for surgery on their patients are being turned down - even though the GP's have money available in their budgets for the operations.

Mr Moss will also be asked to explain:

- The decline in the differential between Northern Ireland health spending and the UK average, taking into account a greater incidence of coronary heart disease (Northern Ireland has a heart death rate 20% higher than the UK average);
- Surgical waiting times which can force an employee to be absent from work for up to 31 months, at a time when employers may reasonably be expected to keep a job open for no more than a year;
- apparent lack of funding for packages of care for stroke patients in the community.

Said Andrew Dougal: "Northern Ireland also has a rate of unemployment which is 40% higher than the UK average. With it comes greater ill-health. Factors such as these have not been taken into account when assessing the province's health needs."