



The College of Psychiatry of Ireland
Coláiste Síciatrachta na hÉireann

Response to the statement of March 1st 2010 by Minister John Moloney, TD

On March 1st 2010, the Minister of State at the Department of Health with Responsibility for Mental Health, Mr John Moloney, TD, announced plans to close fourteen outdated psychiatric hospitals across Ireland. Around 1200 people, including children, live on wards in these hospitals, some of which the Inspector of Mental Health Services recently described using language as strong as “depressing”, “appalling”, and “unfit for human habitation”. The hospitals are to be replaced within three years with modern community mental health facilities, which will be funded from by the sales of each hospital and associated lands.

The College of Psychiatry of Ireland greatly welcomes the Minister’s announcement, while noting that the commitment to close these hospitals is not new. The closure of psychiatric hospitals that were not fit for purpose and their replacement with “an active, flexible and community-based mental health service” was a cornerstone of Ireland’s national mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, when published in January 2006.

The ongoing funding of these plans will be a matter of interest. Minister Moloney was very clear in his commitment that all proceeds from the sales of hospitals and lands will be ring-fenced for re-investment in mental health services. However, ring-fencing of any proceeds from the sale of psychiatric buildings or lands has been government policy since 2006 - yet, as reported in 2008’s *The Lie of the Land*, a report of the erstwhile Irish Psychiatric Association, there has been little or no transparency regarding the distribution of such funds.

We have significant reservations, too, that a project as important as the fashioning of a first-world mental health service depends for its financing on the vagaries of a plummeting property market. In 2006, this may have seemed sound; in 2010, less so.

We hope that the Minister will provide further detail in the days and weeks to come. We would ask that the Department of Health publish a budget and timeline for the construction of each new facility. We would ask the Minister to confirm that the development of these new and necessary community mental health services will go ahead regardless of the direction of property prices in the next three years.

Again, we welcome Minister Moloney’s plans and we acknowledge his clear personal commitment to all people living with mental ill health in Ireland.