

# Annual Review 2020





To highlight the unprecedented importance of vaccination against flu in the era of COVID-19, UL Hospitals Group and HSE Mid West Community Healthcare launched 'Get a Vaccine - Give a Vaccine' as part of the 2020 Flu Campaign. For every flu vaccination given to healthcare staff in the Midwest, UL Hospitals Group and HSE Mid West Community Healthcare gave the cost of 10 measles vaccines to Unicef for vulnerable children in the developing world.

Pictured (l to r) Suzanne Dunne, Head of Strategy and Healthy Ireland lead, UL Hospitals Group, Donncha O'Callaghan, Unicef Ambassador and Carol Desmond, Allocations Liaison Officer, Midwifery, University Maternity Hospital Limerick.

#### Front Cover:

UL Hospitals Group (ULHG) staff pictured at the opening of the Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) at the UL Sport Arena in June. The ICF was a unique collaboration between the University of Limerick (UL) and ULHG which provided care for non-COVID-19 patients fit for discharge from ULHG, but who would benefit from further rehabilitation, or may be waiting to go into long term care.

#### Photo credits:

Alan Place Photography, Brian Arthur Photography, Keith Wiseman Photography, ULHG Communications Department.

## Contents

CEO Overview	3
About UL Hospitals Group	4
What does UL Hospitals Group do?	5
Our Year in Figures	6
COVID-19 Milestones	8
Themes:	
Our Patients	10
Our Community	12
Keeping in touch during COVID-19	14
Our Staff	16
Our Services	18
Some compliments from our patients in 2020	20
Our Patient Council	22

# CEO Overview

Nobody who lived through it is ever likely to forget the unprecedented public health emergency that was our reality during 2020.

Concerning reports from China in January led UL Hospitals Group to establish our first committee to monitor the situation and to assess our preparedness for a novel coronavirus, the disease arising from which we only later came to describe as COVID-19.

As the situation deteriorated rapidly in the following weeks, it became clear we were dealing with a once-in-a-century pandemic. We watched in horror to see a health system as well-developed as Italy's strain under the pressure of this unknown disease. In Ireland and in the MidWest, we were determined to do all in our power to see no repeat of what was happening in Bergamo.

The wave of anxiety that swept through the population was shared by many of our hospital staff but by the time the first cases presented to the Emergency Department (ED) in University Hospital Limerick (UHL) during the first week of March, we had prepared as well as we could through recruitment, upskilling, retraining and redeployment; acquisition of PPE; expanding critical care surge capacity; expanding our capacity for testing and contact tracing; development of novel means of communicating the rapidly changing guidance; reimagining our clinical space to provide care in segregated Covid and non-Covid streams; and many other measures. UL Hospitals Group pandemic response was co-ordinated through a corporate and clinical governance structure with clear lines of reporting and accountability and our Hospital Crisis Management Team was convened at least once a day during the height of the crisis.

We also fed into the structures supporting the national crisis response and collaborated on the Area Crisis Management Team with Mid West Community Healthcare, the Department of Public Health Mid West, the National Ambulance Service and other partners.

The impact of COVID-19 on our activity during 2020 is clear from the pages of this review. In terms of unscheduled care, presentations to our ED at UHL declined by 8% and at our Injury Units in Ennis, Nenagh and St John's by a combined 10%.

Scheduled care was even more severely impacted by the pandemic and attendances both at outpatient clinics and for inpatient and day case surgery across all six sites fell by approximately 20%. Compliance with public health guidelines and best Infection Prevention & Control (IP&C) practice shrank the available clinical space and reduced efficiencies. Not only did this limit the number of patients we could see but it radically transformed how we worked and trained as practitioners.

How our staff responded will be a matter of enduring pride for me and for UL Hospitals Group. Theatre staff from Ennis, Nenagh and St John's redeployed to support critical care; staff at Croom Orthopaedic Hospital broadened their scope of practice to care for stable medical patients; teams at University Maternity Hospital Limerick managed to maintain 2019 activity levels while ensuring it was one of the few hospitals in the country not to experience an outbreak of COVID-19.

HSE Estates worked wonders during 2020 to complete rapid build emergency works such as new single room bed capacity at UHL and Croom while also delivering on time and within budget longstanding strategic builds such as the 60-bed block at UHL. We were pleased also to realise longstanding projects such as the relocation of Ennis OPD. And in opening the Intermediate Care Facility at the UL Arena we effectively operated a seventh hospital for several months for non-Covid and post-Covid patients.

While we managed at all times to protect emergency and time-critical services, there is no doubt that patients have suffered as a result of the pandemic. Necessary restrictions on visiting have impoverished the life of the hospital for staff and patients alike. Waiting lists for non-Covid patients have increased and initiatives such as the Safety Net agreement with private healthcare providers will continue to be necessary as long as the public health emergency endures.

The pandemic has forced us all to confront important questions of community and what we as individuals can do to look after our fellow citizens. The messages of support and letters of thanks staff have received from our community have kept spirits up during the darkest periods.

Equally valuable has been the widespread compliance with the public health guidelines. As healthcare providers we are acutely aware of the sacrifices individuals and organisations have made to protect essential services. That social solidarity will continue to serve us well into the future as we look to exit the pandemic and honour the memories of those we have lost to this terrible disease.



Colette Cowan  
CEO  
UL Hospitals Group

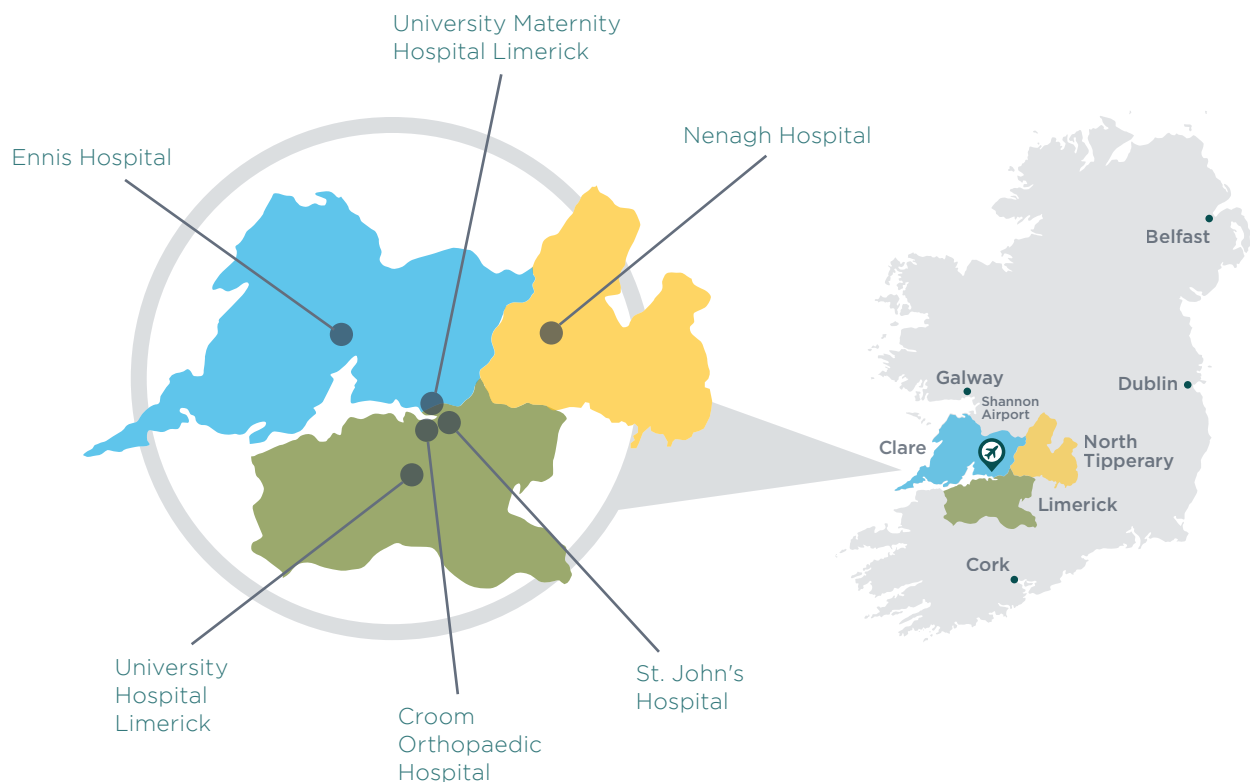


# About UL Hospitals Group

UL Hospitals Group comprises six different hospital sites in the Midwest of Ireland (Limerick, Clare and North Tipperary).

- University Hospital Limerick (UHL)
- University Maternity Hospital Limerick (UMHL)
- Nenagh Hospital
- Ennis Hospital
- Croom Orthopaedic Hospital
- St. John's Hospital (Voluntary)

Operating on a hub-and-spoke system, the centralised critical care facilities at UHL are supported by Model 2 and Model 2S (Specialist) hospitals. We operate on this basis to achieve economies of scale, to allow for a more streamlined and specialised regional service, and to ensure people can still be treated as close to home as possible. Together, these hospitals deliver a range of crucial services and provide a robust, comprehensive healthcare network for our patients across the Midwest.



## Academic Partner

Our academic partner is the University of Limerick (UL). Our relationship with UL is important in improving standards of care, fostering education, clinical research and innovation.

The Clinical Education and Research Centre (CERC) at UHL provides first class training facilities. It is home to UL's graduate entry medical school as well as the educational and research needs of our hospital staff.

The Health Sciences Academy, based in CERC is a partnership between UL, ULHG and HSE Mid West Community Healthcare. Its primary aim is to improve health and wellbeing for people in the Midwest.



University of Limerick



Clinical Education and Research Centre, UHL

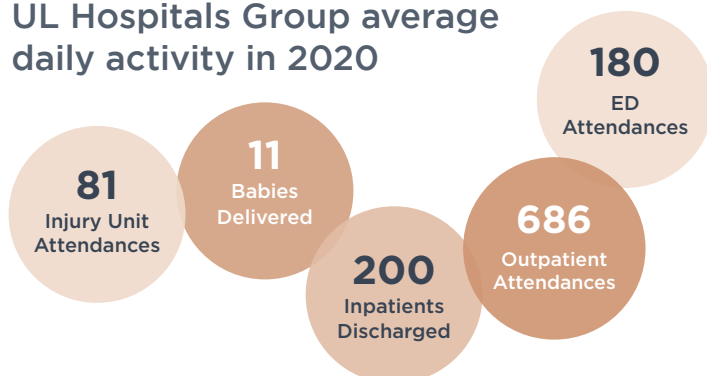
# What does UL Hospitals Group do?



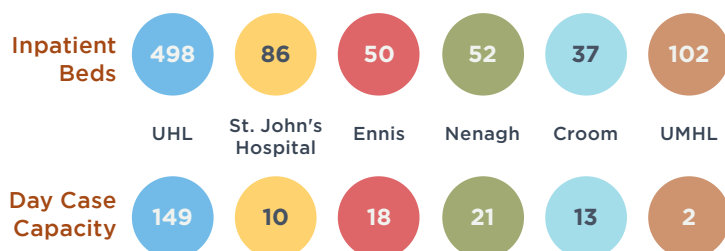
UL Hospitals provides emergency, surgical and medical services on an inpatient and outpatient basis to a catchment area of some 385,172 people in the Midwest of Ireland.

Our 4,506 strong staff\* are proud to serve our community, and we are committed to treating our patients with care, compassion and kindness. \*Refers to WTE (whole time equivalent posts)

## UL Hospitals Group average daily activity in 2020



## Hospital Beds



*\*Inpatient is a patient who goes into hospital to receive medical or surgical care and stays there one or more nights while they are being treated.*

*\*Day Case is a patient admitted on an elective basis; no overnight stay; admitted and discharged on same day. Patient care that resulted in a birth/delivery is not included in day case capacity figures.*

UHL saw 98 new beds coming on stream in 2020. A 60 bed block, as well as 24 and 14 bed blocks, all provide single room en suite facilities designed to help improve patient comfort, safety, privacy and dignity and assist with the management of infection control.

## University Hospital Limerick (UHL)

UHL is the largest hospital in the Group, providing emergency and critical care to the region's patients, especially those who require more complex medical and surgical care.



UHL is one of just eight specialist cancer centres in the country.

UHL has a dedicated coronary centre treating patients for serious heart attacks, and a thrombolysis centre, providing vital care for acute stroke.

UHL provides cutting edge surgical and non-surgical healthcare services.



UHL has the only ED in the Midwest, caring for patients 24/7, 365 days a year.

## Ennis, Nenagh and St. John's Hospitals

Treatment for minor injuries (Injury Units)

Medical Assessment through GP referral

Day Surgery

St John's Hospital also cares for more complex surgical patients who require a short hospital stay.

## Specialist Maternity and Orthopaedic Services



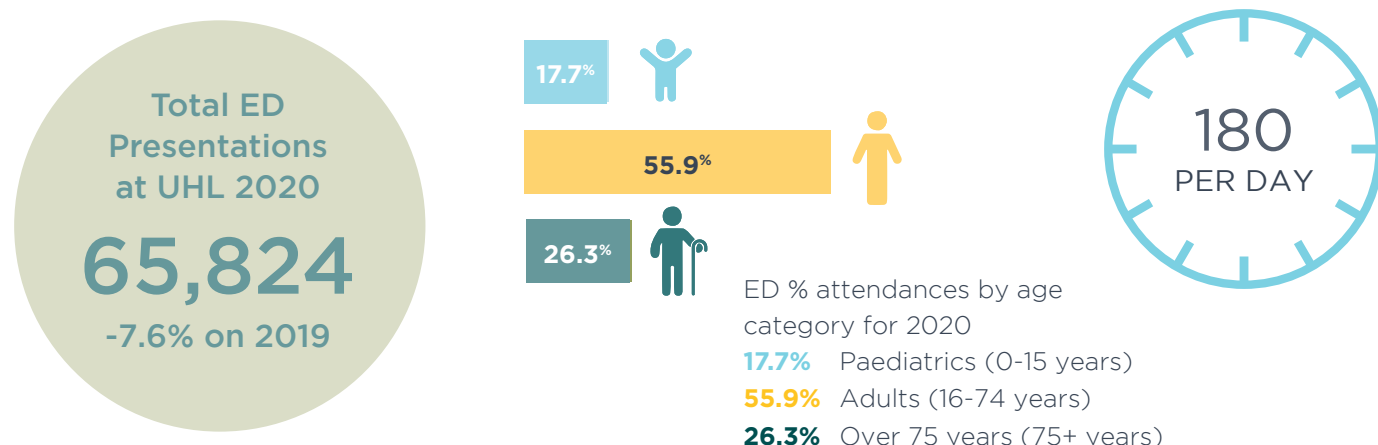
The Group has two Specialist hospitals, both catering for specific needs in the community, University Maternity Hospital Limerick, and Croom Orthopaedic Hospital, a regional centre of excellence. Croom has been an orthopaedic hospital

since 1956. During the pandemic it accepted its first medical patients in almost 70 years to help manage a surge in non-COVID admissions. As part of the national response to COVID-19, work commenced in Croom in 2020 on the construction of a new 24 bed single room facility and state-of-the-art theatre suite.

# UL Hospitals Group: Our Year in Figures

## Activity & Operational Performance for 2020

### Emergency Department University Hospital Limerick (UHL)



### Injury Unit

Injury Units presentations accounted for 31.2% of all emergency presentations across the Group.

**29,917**  
**Presentations**  
-9.5% on 2019



### Readmission Rates

#### Medical



Emergency readmission rate for acute medical conditions, to the same hospital within 30 days of discharge. 11.5% across the Group. The 2020 national benchmark target was 11.1%.

**11.5%**

#### Surgical



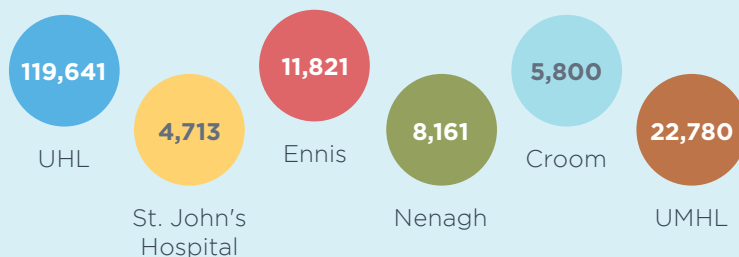
The Group's 2020 surgical readmission rate, to the same hospital within 30 days of discharge, 2.4%. The 2020 national benchmark target was less than or equal to 2%.

**2.4%**

### Outpatient Attendances

Total of new and return outpatient attendances across all sites in 2020

**172,916**  
-20.7% on 2019



### Average Length of Stay (ALOS)

**MEDICAL 5.3 Days**

ULHG remained under the 2020 national benchmark target of 5.4 days.

**SURGICAL 5.0 Days**

ULHG remained under the 2020 national benchmark target of 5.1 days.

## COVID-19

### COVID-19 cases

The average number of:

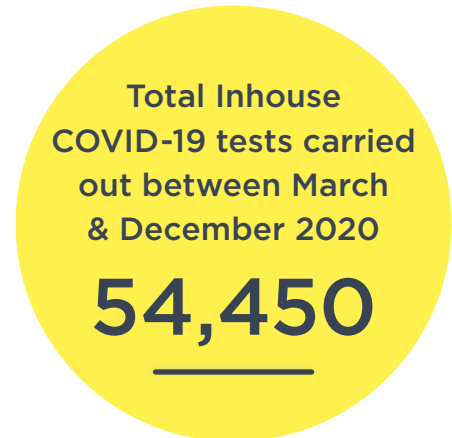
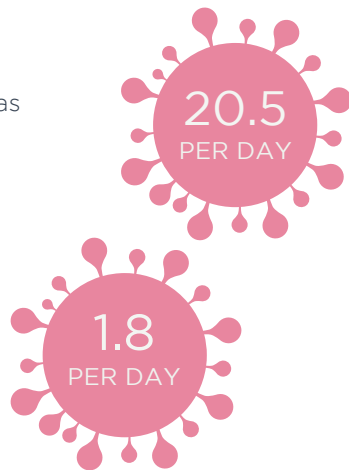
- COVID-19 positive patients in 2020 was 20.5 per day
- COVID-19 positive patients in ICU in 2020 was 1.8 per Day

(From 1st March 2020, source PPBI)

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Masks, 2.8m
- Gloves, 1.7m
- Eyewear, 102,000
- Gowns/Aprons, 1.45m
- Hand gel, 13,555 litres
- Medical Wipes, 8,800 packs (300 per pack)

(Issued through ULHG PPE store, March to December 2020)



### Births

**4,149**  
BIRTHS  
4,155 in 2019

University Maternity Hospital Limerick is the busiest maternity hospital outside of Dublin and Cork.

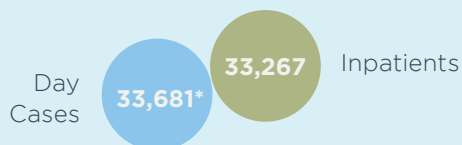


### DOSA

Rate of elective surgical inpatients who had principal procedure conducted on day of admission was 80.5%. The 2020 national target rate was 91.6%.

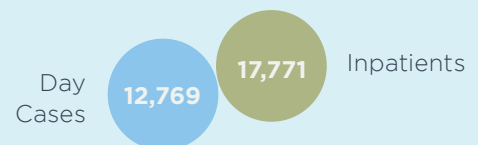
## Inpatient & Day Cases

### Medical

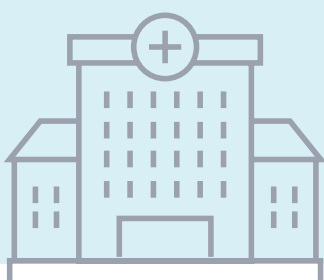
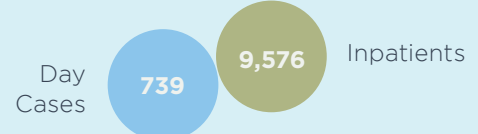


\*This includes 19,042 dialysis cases

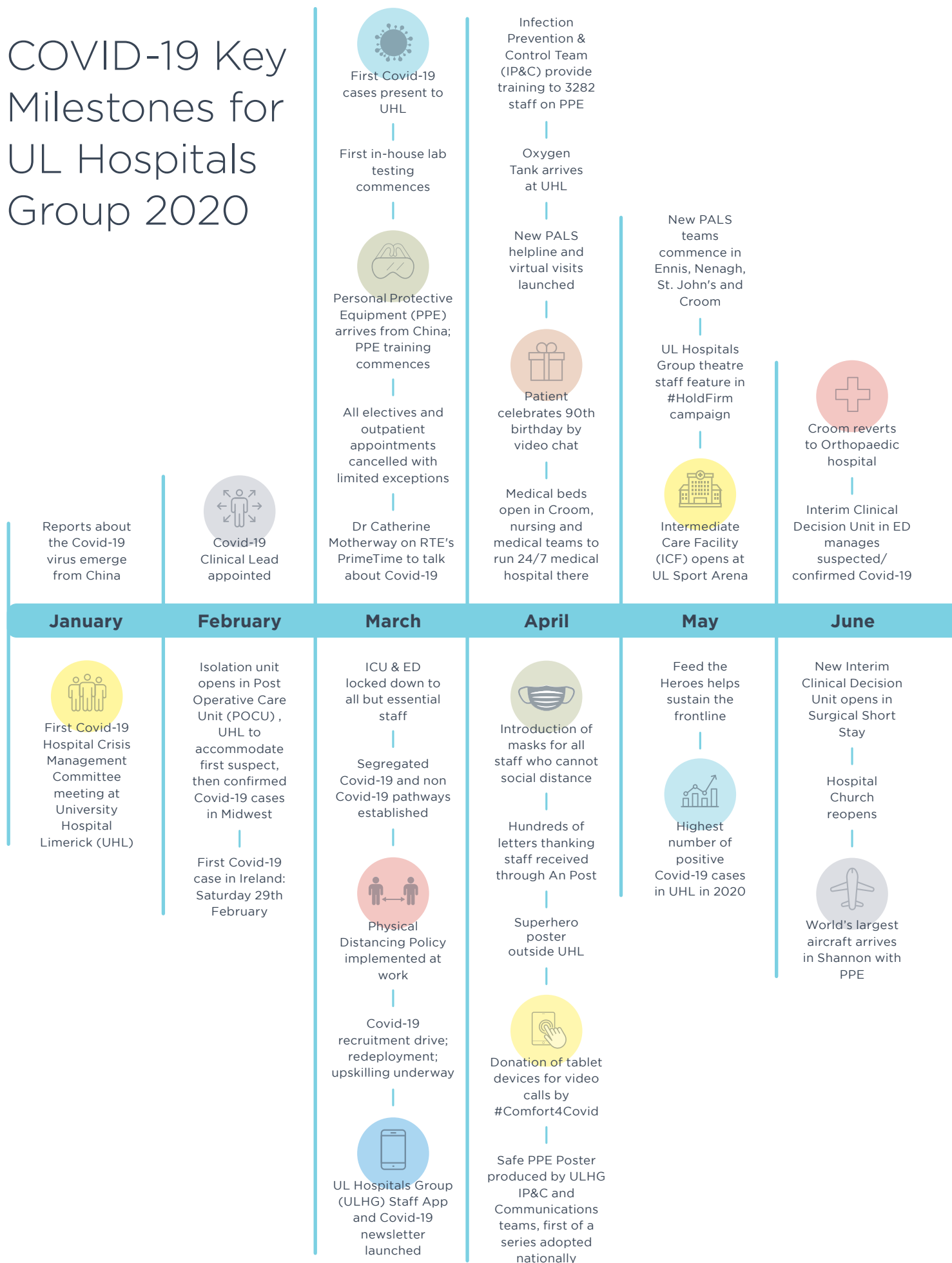
### Surgical



### Maternal & Child Health

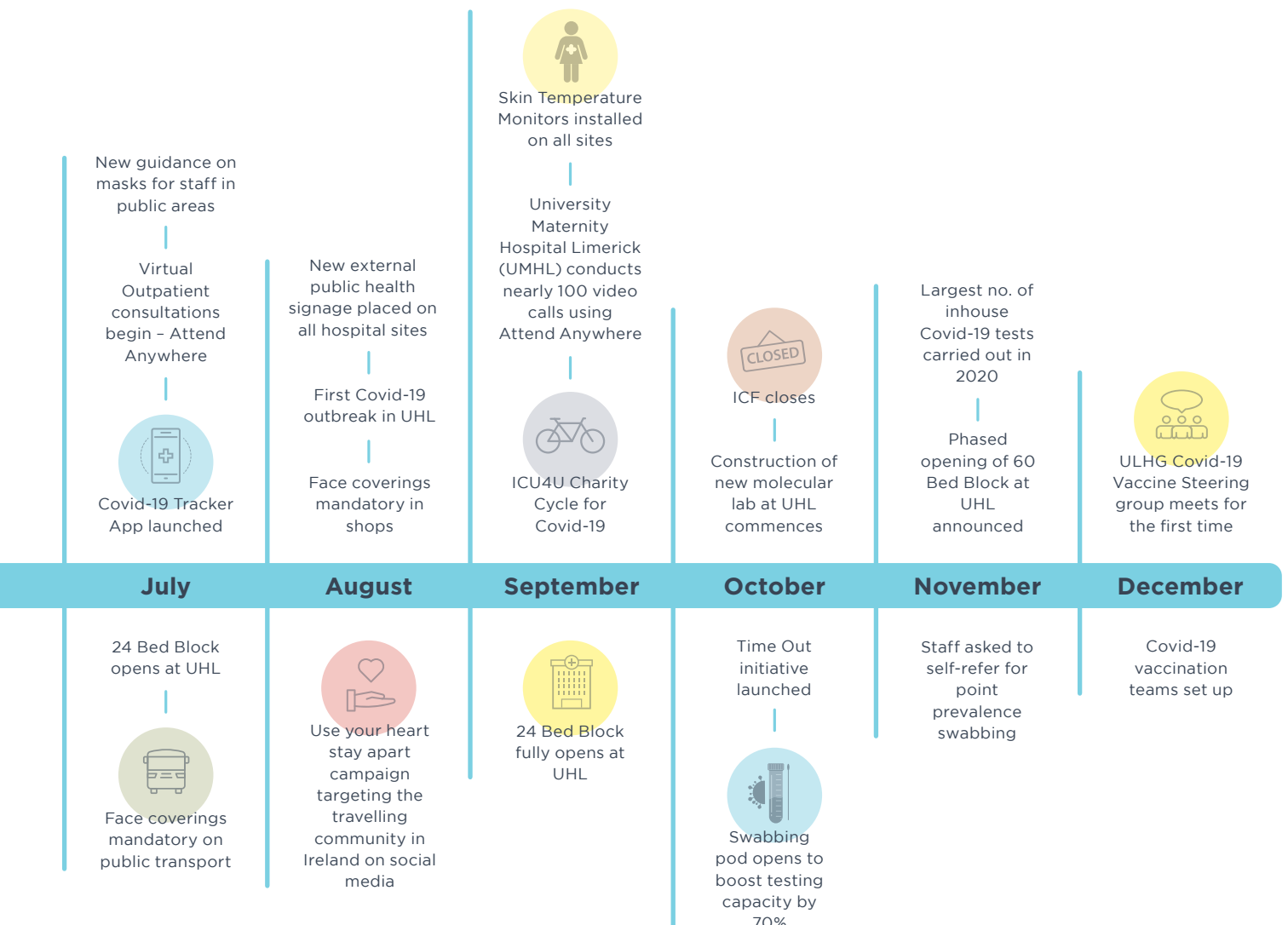


# COVID-19 Key Milestones for UL Hospitals Group 2020



COVID-19 Wave 1





# Our Patients



## Refurbished 'Ark Park' opens at Children's Ark in University Hospital Limerick (UHL)

The newly refurbished playground and outdoor park at the Children's Ark unit in UHL was opened on 6 November 2020. At a special socially-distanced ceremony, Askeaton teenager Lauren McGrath cut the ribbon, watched by her proud mum and delighted Ark

staff and hospital management. The original playground was built 20 years ago, the refurbished Ark Park is 1,250 square metres of colour and tranquillity in the centre of the buildings that house the wards and offices of the Children's Ark unit.



### Robotic surgery 'first' in early stage bowel cancer

The robotic team in the Department of Colorectal Surgery at UHL broke new ground in treatments available in this country for early stage rectal cancer, by performing the

first Robotic Trans-Anal Minimally Invasive Surgery (TAMIS) operation in Ireland, in 2020.



### Physio broadcast from hospital chapel

The Department of Physiotherapy, UHL used the hospital chapel's live feed to broadcast exercise sessions to patients on the wards at the hospital.

**Top:** Dr John Twomey pictured with Lauren McGrath at the new Ark Park

**Bottom Left:** Mr Colin Peirce, Consultant Colorectal & General Surgeon, UHL

**Bottom Right:** Aoife Hannon, Physiotherapist, UHL

# Our Patients

## New app helps staff deliver best care for diabetes in pregnancy

University Maternity Hospital Limerick (UMHL) is harnessing smartphone technology to help staff deliver the best care for diabetes during pregnancy, with the launch of its new 'Managing Diabetes in Pregnancy' app in January 2020. The creation of the new app, a first for Irish maternity hospitals, has been led by Registered Advanced Midwife Practitioner, Yvonne Moloney, and developed by Appiercom Software Solutions (now Ingenium).



## Home Dialysis transforming the lives of chronic kidney disease patients in Midwest

Home dialysis began to transform the lives of chronic kidney disease patients in the Midwest in 2020. At a time when some 85-90% of the 200-220 patients receiving dialysis treatment for chronic kidney failure were doing so 'in-centre' at UHL, making it one of Ireland's busiest haemodialysis services, the hospital's Department of Renal Medicine team promoted home-based dialysis as the best option for patients requiring the treatment.



"It's as close to normal life as I can have, and that's the most important thing for me."

Rory McKenzie, who has opted for haemodialysis at home.



## Information for our staff and patients

UL Hospitals Group Infection Prevention & Control (IP&C) and Communications teams produced a number of posters around safe use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff and patients which were adopted nationally in 2020.

**Top Right:** Registered Advanced Midwifery Practitioner Yvonne Moloney and team members from UMHL and Appiercom Software Solutions (now Ingenium)

**Above Centre:** Prof Austin Stack, Consultant Kidney Specialist; Dr Liam Casserly, Lead Nephrologist; and Yvonne Crowe, Clinical Nurse Specialist





# Our Community



## Members of University Hospital Limerick (UHL) theatre staff in scrubs on #FormalFriday

Frontline theatre staff at UHL, dressed in their best 'Formal' scrubs say thank you very much to organisers of #FormalFriday. #FormalFriday was organised by Today FM during COVID-19 to raise funds for charities and foundations fighting the pandemic.



## Paediatric pharmacists in Christmas gift appeal

Patrice Barrett, a Paediatric Pharmacist at UHL, organised a Christmas gift appeal for children living in Direct Provision in the Midwest. The campaign, initially organised for children in the centre in Limerick, amassed an incredible 112 Christmas gifts, so it was decided that the appeal would also benefit children in direct provision in Knockalisheen, Co Clare and Borrisokane, Co Tipperary.

**Top:** UHL theatre staff in scrubs on #FormalFriday

**Bottom Left:** Those involved in the Christmas gift appeal for children living in direct provision at the CERC, UHL

# Our Community

## Working with our local partners during the COVID-19 pandemic #MidwestTogether



UL Hospitals Group Communications Department maximised the reach of crucial COVID-19 public health information throughout Limerick, Clare and Tipperary

during the pandemic by harnessing the communications expertise and networks of colleagues in Mid West Community Healthcare and public bodies throughout the region.

Meeting virtually every week via teleconferences, in line with the HSE's recommendations on social distancing, the initiative focused on amplifying and activating national messaging at a local level through various social media initiatives.

The response was fantastic and it delivered a host of simple and effective social media campaigns, all promoted using the distinctive hashtag, #MidwestTogether.

## Words of thanks and support from our community to our healthcare workers



We have witnessed remarkable acts of kindness and generosity by the people of the Midwest which helped to lift the spirits of healthcare workers at the most difficult and challenging of times.

Colette Cowan, CEO, ULHG



Top Left: Dr Joe Kelly, Emergency Medicine Consultant



# Keeping in touch during COVID-19



## Virtual visits during COVID-19 at UL Hospitals Group (ULHG)

In 2020, ULHG began facilitating virtual hospital visits to help keep families in touch during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Wide-ranging visiting restrictions were imposed across the Group on March 5th 2020, as part of efforts to reduce transmission of the virus.

The generous donation by #comfort4covid of 6 tablets to help patients stay connected through virtual visiting was welcomed by the ULHG PALS team.

**Top:** ICU patient Donal McKenna celebrating his birthday in UHL with a virtual call with daughter Sinéad and granddaughter Freya.

**Bottom Right:** Members of the Limerick senior hurling team raised spirits at UHL with a virtual Christmas visit to paediatric (Children's Ark School) and adult (Ward 2C) patients by hurling heroes Declan Hannon (team captain), Sean Finn, Gearoid Hegarty and Cian Lynch



# Keeping in touch during COVID-19

## vCreate launch in Neonatal

In June 2020, University Maternity Hospital Limerick (UMHL) launched a secure video messaging platform to keep parents in touch with their newborn babies in the Neonatal Unit. Called vCreate, the platform allows clinical teams in neonatal and paediatric units to send video updates to parents for those times when they're unable to be with their child.



## What Matters to You

Jo Crowe, Clinical Nurse Manager, Ennis Hospital puts up a 'What Matters to You' chart in a patient's room in June. The chart captures personal information about the patient so that staff know a little more about them & what really matters to them.

**Top Right:** Deirdre O'Connell, CNM2, Neonatal Unit, UMHL, giving a demonstration of vCreate to mum Ashleigh Fogarty and baby Jack from Toomevara, Co Tipperary

**Bottom Left:** Jo Crowe, Clinical Nurse Manager, Ennis Hospital

# Our Staff



## University Hospital Limerick (UHL) staff in 200km ICU4U charity cycle to Dublin

A team of doctors and nursing staff from anaesthesiology, theatre and radiology at UHL made a special push for charity in September 2020, cycling 200km from Dooradoyle to Dublin to raise €100,000 for four charities working with people affected by COVID-19 – Alone, Aware, Breakthrough Cancer Research, and ICUsteps Dublin. Among the UHL group were team captain and ICU consultant Dr Margaret Coleman, ICU consultant Dr Catherine Motherway and her husband Christopher Curley, mother and daughter retired ICU nurse Eileen Greaney O'Neill and Orlaith O'Neill, and team captain Dr Coleman's niece, Sorchá Coleman, a Non-Consultant Hospital Doctor (NCHD) at UHL. The Hub Bike for Life, Limerick provided support for the cyclists.

## Dr Gerry Burke retires as Chief Clinical Director of ULHG

Dr Gerry Burke (pictured right) stepped down from his role as Chief Clinical Director of ULHG into retirement in May 2020, and

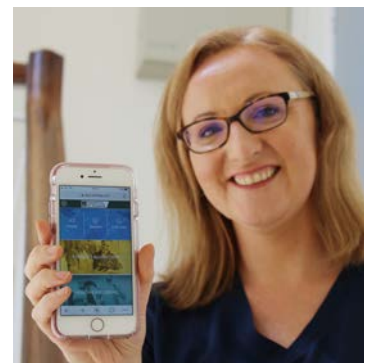


paid tribute to his colleagues and hailed the people of Limerick and the Midwest as “far and away the most egalitarian city and region in the country”.

## Staff App

In March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UL Hospitals Group (ULHG)

Communications Department launched the ULHG Staff App to ensure critical information was reaching all staff. By the end of 2020, the App had 2,561 users.



**Top:** ICU4U Cyclists representing UHL pictured outside the hospital before departure with team captain Dr Margaret Coleman

**Bottom Right:** Dr Sarah O'Connell, Infectious Diseases Consultant and Clinical Lead, COVID-19



# Our Staff

## UL medical student's 'garden hurling marathon' raises €62,616



The 'Garden Hurling Marathon' was run by Mayo hurler and University of Limerick (UL) second year medical student Cathal Freeman, who raised €62,616 for UHL and the Midwest Cancer Society in April 2020. Cathal, helped by his housemates and girlfriend, staked out a 30m circuit close to their home on the UL campus, and completed 1,400 laps of the course, soloing a sliotar all the way.

Professor Paul Burke, Vice Dean of Health Sciences at UL and also the Chief Academic Officer of ULHG, hooked up with Cathal via Zoom to express his appreciation for the fundraising effort.

## Thank you to colleagues for redeploying during COVID-19

Nurse Eoghan Lavin receives a 'Thank You' cert from Ber Murphy, Director of Nursing, UHL (both pictured right) in recognition of his dedication & support in redeploying from St John's Hospital to the ICU in UHL during COVID-19. Thank you Eoghan & all our colleagues who redeployed in 2020.



## Fair Play Award

With the suspension of the soccer season due to COVID-19 our porters and attendants donated their €300 prize pot to the Children's Ark. Thank you to all involved for the kind gesture.

**Top Left:** Professor Paul Burke

**Bottom Left:** Porters and attendants at UHL



# Our Services



## Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) patients benefit from holistic healthcare model

The ICF was opened on the 8 June in the reconfigured main hall of the UL Sport Arena, a fully equipped temporary hospital setting for non COVID-19 or post COVID-19 patients who no longer required acute medical attention, but who could benefit from a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to their ongoing rehabilitation and support before final discharge.

The 68-bed ICF, which had capacity to scale up to 84 beds, grew out of the collaborative relationship between UL Hospitals Group (ULHG) and the University of Limerick (UL), and was developed as a contingency solution to the patient flow and crowding challenges experienced in the region's hospitals during the pandemic.



## Paediatric Cardiology Service established at University Hospital Limerick (UHL)

A paediatric cardiology service was established at UHL in May 2020. Limerick was designated an Area Children's Cardiac Centre under the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network. The regional service commenced through the appointment of Dr Rachel Power as consultant paediatrician with a specialist interest in paediatric cardiology. Nurse specialist Georgina Purcell was also appointed to support this significant service development.

**Top:** Members of UL Hospitals Group's Health and Social Care Professionals team at the ICF at UL Sport Arena

**Bottom Left:** Dr Rachel Power, Consultant Paediatrician and Dr Siobhan Gallagher, Consultant Paediatrician and Clinical Director, Maternal and Child Health Directorate

# Our Services

## Increased capacity across UL Hospitals Group in 2020

A number of construction projects were set in motion at ULHG in 2020 for the addition of 98 new beds on the UHL site (including the new 60 bed block at UHL which opened in November 2020 and the 24 and 14 bed blocks, also opened in 2020) and 24 in Croom Orthopaedic Hospital. In addition, in Nenagh Hospital, eight additional beds opened in June 2020 (phase 2 of new medical ward build).

These are all state-of-the-art, en-suite, single rooms for male or female patients, providing care and treatment for acutely ill patients from admission to discharge. Each ward has been planned out to benefit work practices and maximise infection prevention and control. Planning permission was also submitted in 2020 for building work on a new 96 Bed ward block at UHL.



## New lab and swabbing pod boosts UHL COVID-19 testing capacity




COVID-19 testing capacity at UHL was boosted by 70% in 2020, with two new emergency construction projects that formed a significant regional component of the Government's national pandemic strategy.

The works included a swabbing pod for hospital staff and pre-operative patients, completed in October as well as commencement of a purpose-built COVID-19 laboratory (due for completion in 2021). Costing approximately €4m, the new COVID-19 lab will provide purpose-built areas for the four stages of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique for DNA analysis.


**Top Right:** Defence Forces pictured on the roof of the 24 bed block at UHL


**Bottom Left:** Dr Patrick Stapleton, Consultant Microbiologist, UHL


# Some Compliments from our patients in 2020


 The highest of praise for the ambulance crew, nurses & doctors @ULHospitals today who looked after my mother with advanced Alzheimer's for a minor operation. Their care for their patient (& her son) was phenomenal, particularly given the immeasurable challenges they now face.


 I just wanted to thank you Claire and the very nice doctor who attended my mother. You were all so kind to us and your wonderful care has aided her in a speedy recovery.  
(Ennis Injury Unit)


 @ULHospitals thank you to all the guys at Paed A&E and Caterpillar ward for looking after my small man this week.

 Thank you to each and every one of you for helping us through my treatment, for all the advice and reassurance. You are all amazing. Best wishes to you all for 2020 and beyond.  
(Oncology)


 Thank you for helping my mammy get better. We appreciate everything you do.  
(Oncology)

 Had my operation at last in St John's hospital @ULHospitals and I am recovering with wonderful staff, a spotless hospital and great food. My first time here and I have to say.  
#CreditWhereCreditsDue  
#StJohnsHospitalLimerick


 Thanks to the dedication of the Paediatric Diabetes Team at University Hospital Limerick, my daughter was still able to receive support for her diabetes management via a virtual clinic with Professor O'Gorman and Diabetes Nurse Specialist, Maria. My husband and I were both able to attend work as normal on this day.

 Appointment at @ULHospitals fracture clinic today. X-ray and seen by consultant within 20 min, and gone. What a service and super friendly staff.




 First class service as usual, please keep doing it and safely. (Emergency Department)


---

 @ULHospitals out of hospital 7 days after surgery. Just want to convey massive thanks to Surgeon Burns and all his team, Dr Ahmed for the diagnosis and particularly all the nurses who were amazing while facing into such a difficult time. Ye are all incredible people! Thank you!


---

 I can't thank the maternity/ midwife staff enough for the care they provided me. I felt that myself and my baby were in the best of hands during our stay. Everyone was extremely pleasant and made me feel at ease the whole time. I truly hope that their incredible dedication to the work is acknowledged.


---

 A huge thank to the Admin, Nursing, surgical, aftercare and domestic staff at University Hospital of Limerick. A great bunch of really hardworking and dedicated staff.


---

 I just finished radiation treatment. No super powers, but my eyebrows are back & 2020 has shown me that I have the greatest family & friends in the world & I get to enjoy Christmas & 2021 with them because of the #cancer care team @ULHospitals.

---

 Just a note to say thanks to all at the injury clinic. From the lovely lady on reception to the caring nurse and Doctor. Please bring my compliment to your management. An excellent local service. Best wishes, thank you again. (Nenagh Injury Unit)

---

 Friday I was discharged from @ULHospitals after a week in the fantastic care of @MrTonyMoloney1 and his team, Conor, Mark, Mary and the wonderful nurses and staff in 1C. Never been to hospital before, was nervous and worried but wow the care and kindness was unreal thanks so much.

---

# Our Patient Council

The year 2020 promised to be one of considerable activity for the UL Hospitals Group Patient Council. Our 2019 Council review identified a programme of activity aimed at contributing to its role of “patient and family advocate”. This, along with the 11-point action plan from the review of the Patient and Public Participation Strategy 2017 – 2020, gave plenty of scope for further embedding the Council in the UL Hospitals Group patient and family care programmes.

Then, COVID-19 struck. Pandemic conditions emerged and created enormous challenges for and new demands on Ireland’s health services. The Patient Council acknowledges and expresses its sincere appreciation and admiration for the preparedness of UL Hospitals Group in its battle with this new virulent disease.

For the Patient Council, a year of promised intensive activity was cut short in March with the decision of the hospitals group to cancel all committee meetings in compliance with national health guidelines. It was envisaged that committee meetings and activity would resume only when the battle with the virus was won. However, some Council activity was possible through video calls and with a small number of in-person meetings during periods of easing of restrictions.

The Patient Council sought a term extension to the end of 2021 in anticipation of its programme of activity being curtailed and to plan for a new Council for 2022. Public membership was increased to enable the Council to respond better to requests from hospital sites for public members. It was encouraging that PALS managers numbers were increased to three, enabling better responses to family concerns about patients especially during these pandemic times.

An outcome from our 11- point action plan concerned about pressure on PALS managers even before COVID-19.

Regular comprehensive reports from UL Hospitals Group CEO Colette Cowan began in March and continued throughout the year. The Council wishes to record its appreciation for the detail in the reports especially having regard to the hospital’s challenges of COVID-19 and teams’ efforts to maintain limited regular inpatient and outpatient services.


Considering all that has happened during 2020, it is a further great achievement that the new 60 bed unit was operating at near full capacity by year end, and that the new 96 bed unit at UHL was also making progress. New building projects at Croom Orthopaedic Hospital, and extensions at Nenagh and Ennis were progressing. These new facilities will enable expanding of existing and provide new dedicated on-site services. This is a particularly notable achievement against the background of COVID-19.

On this challenging and special occasion, I wish to acknowledge and thank all UL Hospitals Group Patient Council members for their interest and commitment during 2020. It is very encouraging and rewarding to be amongst a highly committed and dedicated group (public and staff) of people freely giving of their time. On behalf of the Council, I wish to note the sad death of our esteemed colleague and friend Donal O’Brien.

**John Hannafin Chairman**  
UL Hospitals Group Patient Council



Members of the ULHG Patient Council (l to r) Elizabeth O’Leary, Declan McNamara (vice-chairman), John O’Neill, Michael Ryan, John Hannafin (chairman), Judy Ryan, Anne Fitzgibbon, Melody Buckley, Marie Killowry, Catherine English, Virginia O’Dowd, Janice Cahill, Niamh O’Grady, Prof Brian Lenehan, Colette Cowan, CEO, Niamh Hogan. Missing from photo: Kay Caball, Jill Franz, Tammy Meaney, Bernadette Moore and Mike Dwane.



## A Blessing for Healthcare Workers

In this fragile frontier-place, your kindness  
Becomes the light that consoles the broken-hearted,  
Awakens within desperate storms  
That oasis of serenity that calls  
The spirit to rise from beneath the weight of pain,  
To create a new space in the person's mind  
Where they gain distance from their suffering  
And begin to see the invitation  
To integrate and transform it.

May you embrace the beauty in what you do  
And how you stand like a secret angel  
Between the bleak despair of illness  
And the unquenchable light of spirit  
That can turn the darkest destiny towards dawn.

John O'Donohue,  
Irish poet and philosopher

We are grateful to the family of John O'Donohue for giving us permission to feature this special poem in our Annual Review 2020 and for allowing us to video record the poem last year during COVID-19 for healthcare workers everywhere. Our colleagues in University Hospital Limerick, University Maternity Hospital Limerick, St. John's Hospital Limerick, Ennis Hospital, Nenagh Hospital and Croom Orthopaedic Hospital video recorded a line each from 'A Blessing for Healthcare Workers'. We posted the video to our social media in May 2020.

