**IHCA Press Statement**

 The Irish Hospital Consultants Association has written today to the Labour Relations Commission to confirm its willingness to engage in non-binding discussions with the HSE under the Public Service Agreement.

The HSE has acknowledged that consultants already work well beyond their contracted hours. In addition to working their full week, consultants are also on call to treat patients every hour of every night and right through the weekend.

The HSE wishes to extend hospital services further. IHCA President, Mr Denis Evoy said: “This can only be achieved safely if there is an agreed minimum number of consultants in each specialty to provide a continuous consultant presence on site consistent with international best practice. This was acknowledged by the Hanly Report in 2003 which recommended that we should have 3,600 consultants by 2013 to achieve a fully operational consultant-provided service. However, we still only have about two thirds of that number today. Consultants have responded to this shortage by demonstrating extensive flexibility responding to the urgent and unpredictable needs of patients.”

In the interim, population growth has exceeded the assumptions in the Hanly Report, increasing demand for hospital services further. Mr Evoy said: “Proper discussions require that the HSE provides definitive information on the proposed reconfiguration of acute hospital services and how they will be resourced. Consultants have led the clinical care programmes that have already delivered efficiencies and savings. The right thing to do now is to plan properly for patient care and the required medical staffing levels.”

**For further information, contact Martin Varley, Secretary General, 087 227 4099**

**8th August, 2012**