**Patient care compromised as poor conditions are resulting in a consultant “brain drain”**

**Inability to replace emigrating consultants exacerbating health crisis**

**Saturday 12th October 2013:** The Irish Hospital Consultants Association (IHCA) has today said that a consultant ‘brain drain’ has been created due to a deterioration in hospital working conditions and unrelenting budget cuts that have forced some of the country’s best consultants to seek work outside of Ireland. The IHCA today held its 25th IHCA Annual Conference in Maynooth, Co Kildare where the attending consultants heard that approximately 20% of consultant posts in the public system are either vacant or filled on a temporary basis.

Speaking at the Conference today, Mr Denis Evoy, IHCA President, said: *“The continued degradation of consultants’ working conditions and contracts is changing the medical landscape in Ireland and resulting in a system that cannot cater for its patients. Ireland’s health service is being run with a focus on the implementation of declining annual budgets rather than encouraging excellence across the system and making patients the priority. An extra 230,000 patients went through the doors of our hospitals last year compared with 2007 – a period that has seen cuts of around a quarter in acute services budgets. The continued focus on absolute budget cuts rather than a targeted emphasis on strategic savings is destined for abject failure as was evidenced recently in mid-Staffordshire. Our health system and the frontline workers in this system cannot continue to deliver the services being expected from them while maintaining acceptable levels of patient care.”*

“*Ireland competes on a global level and it can no longer recruit and retain the most talented doctors and consultants. The brightest and best graduates, having finished prestigious fellowships, are accepting well-resourced and well remunerated posts in America and Australasia. The prolonged expectation by the HSE that consultants will endure declining working conditions, uncompetitive contracts and systems failures that result in compromised patient care cannot continue. The inability to appoint permanent consultants with appropriate contracts is impacting on patients directly through growing waiting lists, longer waiting times and cancellations of elective surgery,”* continued Mr Evoy.

Commenting on the development of the hospital networks, Mr Evoy said that the reconfiguration of existing and new networks could potentially have a positive impact for both patients and frontline staff. “*Consultants can help bring about reform and aid in the reconfiguration of acute hospital services. To reconfigure effectively and to deliver high quality services, a proper change management schedule needs to be put in place, with the assurance of support networks and utilising the flexibility in contract types and categories to allow consultants to treat more patients. These changes should impact positively on recruitment and therefore we will have a better health system for all.”* He added that *“improvements in health service delivery cannot be achieved without the recruitment and retention of the requisite number of high calibre consultants.”*

**ENDS**

**For further information contact:**

James Dunny, FleishmanHillard 086 3883903