Speech by Tánaiste Joan Burton T.D. at the 60th Birthday celebrations for Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown

21st April, 2015

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Introduction
I would like to thank the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland Hospital Group for its kind invitation to be here today.

We are here today to mark a momentous anniversary not just for Connolly Hospital, but in the life of Dublin 15.

As the hospital celebrates this 60th Anniversary, I want to talk about some major projects for the Hospital.

The government has committed to delivering a 100-bed nursing unit for the elderly;

The development of specialist facilities for children, which we expect to go to planning during the summer.

There is the possible relocation of maternity services here from the Rotunda.

And the development of the hospice on the grounds.

I’ll speak more about these later.

Staff
But a hospital is nothing without the people who work in it. I want to congratulate all the staff who have given such service and care over all the years.

From the porters, the maintenance and the administration staff to the nurses, doctors and specialists - all have played their part.

I want also to pay tribute to the particular character of the hospital.

Many people from different families have worked here down the decades.

And although the hospital caters to one of largest population centres in the state, it still has the element of the rural community it developed with.

A Public Health System
Connolly is an excellent example of the importance of public investment into hospitals. A civilised society cherishes the health and welfare of its citizens, and does its utmost to protect both.
In that regard, the cornerstones are a strong welfare system and a public health system where people are treated on the basis of medical need and not simply on the strength of their wallet.

In that context, Connolly must smile that this hospital is named after him.

I know from meeting his relatives that they are immensely proud of this fact.

Next year we will mark the centenary of the Easter Rising, in which Connolly was so instrumental.

One of the things that made Connolly most angry – one of the driving forces for his actions - was that the healthcare system in Dublin, and the country at large, was among the worst in Europe.

Diseases such as diphtheria and cholera were a major problem, arising from the dirty water and lack of sanitation in the city, particularly in the slums.

In 1913, Connolly wrote: “It is not strange to find that Dublin, a city famous for its charitable institutions and its charitable citizens, should also be infamous for the perfectly hellish conditions under which its people are housed, and under which its men, women and children labour for a living.”

**Noel Browne**

In 1948 the then Minister for Health, Noel Browne, in an attempt to combat the spread of TB, announced the awarding of Ireland’s first million pound building contract for the building of sanatoria in Blanchardstown, Galway and Cork to Sisk Builders.

The land for Blanchardstown was acquired by Compulsory Purchase Order from Baron Holmpatrick of Abbotstown House.

The treatment for TB in those days consisted of rest, nutritious food and fresh air.

The architectural design of the Sanatorium was based around the principle of isolating the sick from the healthy in order to contain the spread and so the structure was comprised of large numbers of separate units surrounded by parkland.

The hospital provided care for 530 patients who came from Rialto, Crooksling, Ballyowen and Portrane.

It is thanks to the Irish Sweepstakes that Connolly – or the Dublin Regional Sanatorium - was born. And whilst the allocation of monies might not stand up to the more rigorous governances of today, the reality is that Connolly - and many more hospitals - would not be here today, without the initial investment of over £1.5 million.

Connolly started its life as a place of refuge for the poor of Dublin who contracted TB and many would have died without its existence.
The advent of antibiotics in the 1960’s and 1970’s signalled the demise of TB and a new direction for Connolly Hospital.

Present Day
Since those early days, Connolly Hospital has grown from strength to strength.

It now serves a catchment of 250,000 people.

It provides specialisations in areas for which the hospital has rightly become renowned.

And some significant expansions are taking place:

Last year, Leo and I had the pleasure of opening the new MRI scanner and the refurbished Acute Medical Assessment Unit (AMAU).

This year, work has commenced on the upgrading of the existing radiology Department.

And we look forward to the development of specialist facilities for children.

I understand a planning application is being lodged for July.

Relocation of the Rotunda
There is also significant potential around the relocation of services from the Rotunda to here.

This would be a good development for mothers and babies in the wider Dublin region, and indeed for the whole population of the North East.

It would bring the service to closer to mothers and babies, and provide faster access to updated facilities for premature babies and babies needing special care and attention after birth.

Conclusion
For six decades, this hospital has successfully evolved and grown, with the sole aim of meeting the needs of the people in its community and surrounding areas.

As we celebrate its anniversary, let us remember all of the staff who have given so much over the past 60 years to ensure that this hospital continues to meet the needs of its community, and continues to grow and develop into the future.

Thank you.