Irish citizens protest the shutdown of accident and emergency services at Roscommon Hospital, 2010-2011

Time period notes: Although the campaign officially ends when Roscommon Hospital shuts down its A&E services, Roscommon citizens continued to hold weekly protests.

8 August 2010 to: 11 July 2011

Country: Ireland
Location City/State/Province: Roscommon County/Connacht province
Location Description: Primarily in Roscommon County

Goals:
To prevent the government from shutting down accident and emergency services and, later, to get the government to bring back accident and emergency services at Roscommon Hospital.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Nurses made a banner of torn sheets protesting the shutdown.
- 034. Vigils › 500 local residents and former patients held a candlelit vigil outside.
- 038. Marches › 8,000 citizens, led by HAC, marched to Roscommon Hospital
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › 8,000 protesters gathered in the town centre for a rally where county mayor Luke Flanagan spoke.
- 162. Sit-in › Roscommon Hospital Action Committee (HAC) held a sit-in at the Accident and Emergency (A&E) service unit. 100 protesters stayed there all night.

Methods in 2nd segment:
Methods in 3rd segment:
Methods in 4th segment:
Methods in 5th segment:
Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › At the protest at Leinster hall, citizens held signs demanding the protection of A&E services
- 036. Performances of plays and music › A marching band played music at the Leinster Hall protest
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support › 400 people protested at Roscommon Hospital when the A&E services shut down.
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support › HAC held a protest outside of Leinster hall to pressure local authorities to join their protest.
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support › HAC held protests at 7 bridges over the Shannon River to hold up signs and show their discontent with the government's decision.
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support › HAC sent 50 people to a nearby hospital in protest of the upcoming shut down.

Notes on Methods:
Throughout the six segments, the citizens protesting maintained an active Facebook page calling for “People Power” and to rise against the upcoming service cuts.

Classifications

Classification:
Defense
Cluster:
Human Rights
Group characterization:

• Nurses
• Roscommon citizens
• former patients

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Roscommon Hospital Action Committee (HAC), John McDermott (Chairman of the HAC)

Partners:
Nurses, former patients, Roscommon citizens, Luke Flanagan (member of parliament)

External allies:
Not known

Involvement of social elites:
Luke Flanagan (member of parliament)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

• Former Patients
• John McDermott (chariman of the HAC)
• Nurses
• Roscommon Hospital Action Committee (HAC)
• Roscommon citizens

Groups in 2nd Segment:
On 8 August 2010, members of Roscommon Hospital Action Committee (HAC) held a sit-in at the Accident and Emergency (A&E) unit at Roscommon County Hospital. There were rumors that the government planned to shut down this unit at 8 PM that night, so 100 protestors blocked the doorway and announced that they were willing to stay there all night. Nurses made a banner out of torn sheets that read “Our Hands Can Save Lives but This Is Death at the Hands of Fine Gael and Labour.” Health service chiefs did not intervene, nor were there visible security forces. 500 local residents and former patients gathered outside of the hospital in support and held a candlelit vigil with nurses.

Rumors had been circulating Ireland that the Irish government planned to shut down services at Roscommon County Hospital. HAC led protests against these threats, rallying citizens to show their support for the hospital.

On 14 August 2010, 8,000 citizens marched to the Roscommon Hospital in Ireland. The HAC, led by Chairman John McDermott, held these protests. Protestors gathered at 11 AM at Dr Hyde Park GAA grounds and marched to the Roscommon County Hospital. These protestors held hands to create a human chain and encircled the hospital with at least ten rows of people.

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HAC referred to this protest as the “Hands Around our Hospital Protest,” as its goal was to send a message to the government to leave the hospital alone. Then protestors marched to the town centre for a rally. The county mayor, Luke Flanagan, also a member of parliament, spoke out to the audience and said that HAC would run a candidate in the next general election to save the hospital, if need be.

In Ireland in 2011, Taoiseach (head of government) Enda Kenny and Health Minister James Reilly discussed the possibility of ending Roscommon Hospital’s A&E services.

Early July, Minister Reilly announced that the government planned to shut down Roscommon Hospital’s A&E services. In place of these services, Roscommon Hospital would have “urgent care units” that opened between 8 AM to 8 PM. Should citizens require emergency treatment, ambulances would take them to acute emergency treatment offered at nearby hospitals. Paramedics would treat accident or stroke victims in ambulances in route to another hospital. Minister Reilly argued that Roscommon County Hospital was unsafe and that it would, instead, be safer to send patients to hospitals over 125 kilometers away. Health services had instructed ambulance drives to bypass the Roscommon Hospital. The government had acted under the advice of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), a government funded agency in Ireland that monitors the safety and quality of the Irish healthcare system, and the Health Service Executive (HSE), an organization responsible for providing health care and health and personal social services with public funds.

The reactions that met this decision were furious. Citizens claimed that this change would put people’s lives on the line. Additionally, many citizens and HAC protestors accused Minister Reilly of instituting these changes to avoid spending money on the hospital.

On 1 July 2011, HAC announced its plans to hold protests in response to the government’s consideration of downgrading Roscommon hospital services.

On 4 July 2011, HAC sent 50 people to the A&E Unit at University College Galway Hospital in Galway, Ireland. These 50 protestors intended to show the University College Galway Hospital’s inability to provide care for additional patients. If the government shut down Roscommon Hospital’s A&E services, patients would have to go to nearby hospitals such as the University College Galway Hospital for care. HAC organized this protest to show that this proposed possibility was inadequate and ineffective for helping citizens of Roscommon.

On 6 July 2011, HAC protestors did stage a protest outside of Leinster House. They held signs and a marching band played music. Protestors argued to pressure local deputies to stand with the people against the potential downgrades. At this protest, where hundreds of people gathered, Luke Flanagan, a member of parliament, spoke to the crowd against the government’s looming decisions. These protestors told video cameras that they did not want an apology, but their resources returned.

Then, on 8 July 2011, John Hennessy, regional director of operations for HSE West, announced that A&E facilities would definitely close down at Roscommon Hospital. HAC held protests and demonstrations at 7 bridges over the Shannon River. These protestors did not intend to slow down traffic, but to send a message to the public that they were unhappy with the decision made by the government. Protestors put signs up on the bridge that told citizens not to get into an accident in the surrounding 125 kilometers, as this distance was the distance that corresponded with Roscommon Hospital, and its missing A&E unit.

HAC considered taking legal action in Irish courts against the government. On 11 July 2011, 400 people gathered to protest at the Roscommon Hospital with flags, white crosses, and signs. The A&E services were shut down on 11 July 2011, despite protests.

Taoiseach Kenny announced that the government would not change this decision. Still, HAC continues to hold weekly protests and maintain a strong presence on Facebook to continue posting articles against the withdrawal of A&E services.
Research Notes

Sources:


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Aileen Eisenberg, 25/03/2013

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