



Letters to the Editor

Changing demographics

Sir, - It is most unfortunate that a failure by the Department of Health and the HSE to plan for adequate long-term provision should be described as a "demographic time bomb" ("Time to start planning for our demographic time bomb", Health and Family, March 11th).

Given that we increasingly recognise collective ageing into later life as one of the greatest achievements of the 21st century, bringing a demographic dividend at human, cultural and economic levels, there is no place in public discourse for such negative terminology.

In addition, there is increasing evidence that levels of disability among the oldest old are gradually falling, providing some attenuation of the expected burden of severe disability, and we have seen the introduction of improvements in community care such as the home-care packages.

However, Tadhg Daly is right that present and future generations will regard with dismay the failure of successive Ministers and senior officials in the Department of Health and the HSE to remedy a deficit, widely recognised for many decades, in nursing home places, particularly in urban areas. In addition, the long-advertised failure to upgrade outdated public nursing homes means that many will no longer be compliant with Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) regulations, further aggravating the shortage.

Over the last few decades we have poured hundreds of millions of euro into new hospital developments - the call by Nursing Home Ireland for urgent action should prompt a speedy diversion of such capital spending towards nursing home renewal and development, as well

as ready access to funding for nursing home care for those who need it. - Yours, etc,

Prof DESMOND O'NEILL,
Professor in Medical Gerontology,
Centre for Ageing, Neuroscience and the Humanities,
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2.