

## **The Religious Sisters of Charity Will End Our Involvement in Saint Vincent's Healthcare Group and Will Have No Involvement in the New National Maternity Hospital**

### **Statement by Sr Mary Christian, Congregational Leader of the Religious Sisters of Charity**

"The Religious Sisters of Charity will end our involvement in St Vincent's Healthcare Group and will not be involved in the ownership or management of the new National Maternity Hospital.

"For the last two years we have been actively working to find the best way to relinquish our shareholding of the St Vincent's Healthcare Group (SVHG). It includes three hospitals; St. Vincent's University Hospital, St. Vincent's Private Hospital and St. Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire.

"Although the Sisters of Charity no longer have any direct involvement in the provision of healthcare services we remain dedicated to preserving the legacy of Mary Aikenhead, whose mission in life was to heal and care for the sick and poor. We believe that the future continued success of SVHG can best be ensured by our transferring ownership of the group to a newly formed company with charitable status to be called "St. Vincent's". The Religious Sisters of Charity will have no involvement in this new company.

"Upon completion of this proposed transaction, the requirement set out in the SVHG Constitution, to conduct and maintain the SVHG facilities in accordance with *The Religious Sisters of Charity Health Service Philosophy and Ethical Code*, will be amended and replaced to reflect compliance with national and international best practice guidelines on medical ethics and the laws of the Republic of Ireland.

"The SVHG Board, management and staff will continue to provide acute healthcare services that foster Mary Aikenhead's core values of dignity, compassion, justice, quality and advocacy. They will ensure that the three hospitals in SVHG can continue to meet the needs of their patients and families, so that every individual can always access the care and treatment they need to achieve health and well-being."

"St. Vincent's" will replace the Sisters of Charity as the shareholders in SVHG and will meet the following criteria:

- The shares in SVHG will be transferred to St. Vincent's for a nominal/"peppercorn" consideration in return.
- Consistent with the transfer of ownership, the Religious Sisters of Charity will no longer have a right to appoint Directors to the Board of SVHG, and the present two Sister Directors will resign from the Board with immediate effect.
- "St. Vincent's" will not be subject to undue influence by individuals or from any source.
- "St. Vincent's" will not seek to generate any profit or surplus, or to remunerate Directors for their work.

- “St. Vincent’s” Directors will have required skillsets in law, finance, healthcare and social care. They will be true to the values of our Foundress, recognising the right of everyone to access the care and treatment they need to achieve the best possible health care outcomes, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender or personal means.
- In the event of the liquidation or wind-up of St. Vincent’s at any time in the future, any surplus assets arising therefrom will be vested with the Charitable Regulator and utilised for healthcare purposes and facilities with similar values. This is in accordance with the provisions of the RSC Constitution.

“Just as our Founder Mary Aikenhead saw the need in 1834 to establish a hospital to meet the needs of the sick and poor, we believe that it is in the best interests of the patients and children born in the National Maternity Hospital today that they be provided with modern maternity and neonatal services that are women and infant centred and integrated within the Elm Park campus”.

“It is now time for us to relinquish completely our involvement in SVHG. We are confident that the Board, management and staff of SVHG will continue to maintain a steadfast dedication to providing the best possible acute healthcare to patients and their families in line with the values espoused by Mary Aikenhead”.

This proposal has the full support of the Board of SVHG. It is subject to implementation of all necessary legal, financial and regulatory matters.

**ENDS**

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### **Background - The Founding of St Vincent’s Hospital in 1834**

St. Vincent's Hospital was founded in 1834 by Mary Aikenhead, Foundress of the Religious Sisters of Charity, as part of her mission to heal and care for the sick and poor. Over the years it developed schools of medicine, nursing and diagnostic imaging, and in 2001 SVHG was incorporated to include St. Vincent’s University Hospital, St. Vincent’s Private Hospital and St. Michael’s Hospital.

Since St. Vincent’s Hospital was founded it has always maintained an atmosphere of compassion towards its patients and their families, and is guided by values that mean each patient is treated with dignity and respect:

- *Human Dignity* – We respect the dignity and uniqueness of each person.
- *Compassion* – We accept people as they are, bringing empathy and caring to all.
- *Justice* – We act with integrity that respects the rights of all.
- *Quality* – We seek excellence in all aspects of care.
- *Advocacy* – We speak for the voiceless, acting with and for them to achieve the right quality of care.

Mary Aikenhead had a dream and that was: ‘the establishment of a great hospital in which the sick poor should receive all the aid that the physician’s

skill could provide and all the ministrations that the Sisters of Charity could afford’.

In preparation for the fulfillment of her dream, Mary Aikenhead, in 1833, sent three Sisters of Charity to Paris to train in hospital administration. Her dream became a reality with the purchase of a house on St. Stephen’s Green, bought for that purpose with the dowry of a Sister. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1834, the Sisters of Charity took possession of the house. The work of adapting the house to the needs of a hospital was then undertaken and in the spring of 1835 all the arrangements were completed and St. Vincent’s Hospital opened with one ward, containing twelve beds for women. The beds were soon filled and with the increase in the number of applicants a second ward was opened and then a third and finally a ward for children.

The opening of St. Vincent’s attracted much interest among the general public. It was the first hospital in these islands to be organised and staffed by women. Nursing, as in the modern sense, was unknown and it was one of the first great works of Mary Aikenhead to break down prejudices and to raise care of the sick to a profession in her native country. It is recounted that the first surgery performed in St. Vincent’s Hospital was on a little boy who was comforted by Mary Aikenhead while it was being performed.

Over the many years St. Vincent’s outgrew the site at St. Stephen’s Green. In July 1934 there was great excitement at the purchase of the new green field site at Elm Park by the Sisters of Charity as a site for their proposed new hospital. However, hopes of commencing work on the site for the new hospital were dashed by the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945). There had been many false dawns in the history of the coming into operation of the hospital in Elm Park. On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October 1970, the hospital on

the Green was closed to all patients and on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1970, with the help of a fleet of twelve Order of Malta ambulances, seventy-three critically ill patients were transferred to the new St. Vincent’s Hospital, Elm Park.

In 1999 St. Vincent’s changed its title to St. Vincent’s University Hospital. By this time it had become a major academic teaching hospital, affiliated to University College Dublin.

In 2003 St. Vincent’s Healthcare Group Limited was formed and at this time the property of St. Vincent’s University Hospital was transferred into the Company. The Sisters of Charity became the Shareholders and two Sisters of Charity were members of the Board of Directors. In compliance with the Companies Act 2014, a new Designated Activity Company, *St. Vincent’s Healthcare Group*, was set up in 2016.

The hospitals in SVHG have had a long and successful heritage of providing acute healthcare services to the people of Dublin and indeed people from many parts of the country. When we first established hospitals and hospices during the nineteenth century they were operated and staffed by sisters from the Sisters of Charity, with the help of truly supportive staff in our daily work.

**29<sup>th</sup> May 2017**