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30<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Deputy Kevin O' Keeffe, TD  
Dáil Éireann,  
Dublin 2

### **PQ ref 17931/19**

**“To ask the Minister for Health his plans to reduce the waiting lists for children that need to avail of orthodontic treatment in County Cork in view of the fact there is a waiting period of three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”**

Dear Deputy

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The primary goal of orthodontics is to improve the appearance and function of misaligned or crooked teeth. The HSE provides free orthodontic treatment for children with the most severe orthodontic problems. The criteria used to decide whether a child qualifies for treatment in the HSE is determined by nationally agreed eligibility guidelines based on an international grading system (IOTN). To ensure the resources available in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare are used in the most appropriate way to meet the presenting needs, all referrals for the service are triaged and given a priority rating. Children who meet the criteria to be placed on the Priority Waiting List, e.g., cleft palate, impacted teeth, etc, are seen within one month to a year. Children who meet the criteria to be placed on the Functional Waiting List are generally seen within 18 to 24 months and children who meet the criteria to be placed on the Routine Fixed Waiting List are usually seen within 4 years. Timelines for individual children may vary as emergency cases will occur and will need priority so any estimation given may not be accurate.

The HSE's National Service Plan for 2019 sets out the following targets for orthodontic assessment and treatment. The targets for Cork Kerry Community Healthcare orthodontic services are;

- 75% of patient referrals seen for assessment within 6 months
- 99% of patients to have commenced treatment within 4 years

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare has ongoing challenges in reaching these targets due to a population growth in children which has resulted in an increased number of eligible referrals for the service. An increased rate of paid statutory leave has also led to a reduction in available staffing resources. To ensure the available resource is used in the most appropriate way all referrals are triaged by the Consultant Orthodontists in the department and through this process the most severe cases are prioritised and seen first.

As at the end of Quarter 1 2019 in Cork City and County Cork 30% of those on the orthodontic treatment waiting list are waiting less than a year and a total of 86% are waiting less than 3 years with 6% waiting in excess of three years.

There was a National Waiting List Initiative for those waiting routine treatment for over 4 years in 2016. While 237 children from the Cork Kerry area were offered access to this waiting list initiative only 142 availed of the treatment offered under this initiative. As those who availed of treatment under this initiative are coming to the end of their treatment Cork Kerry Community Healthcare anticipates that patients who are now waiting over 4 years will be offered the opportunity to avail of this initiative.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare Orthodontic Service is also looking at initiatives to improve equity of access to the service such as the introduction of a single waiting list, a new IT System, patient flow processes and resource realignment in context of staff retirements/resignations in an effort to improve the effectiveness of the service in reducing waiting times. I regret that individuals on the Waiting List have such an extensive waiting time, however, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare has to live within its resource allocation for the service.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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**Teresa O' Donovan**  
**Head of Service - Primary Care,**  
**Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**