



18 February 2019

**Deputy Mattie McGrath
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2**

PQ 5185/19: To ask the Minister for Health, the measures being taken to address the significant delays in accessing orthodontic treatment in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter

Dear Deputy McGrath,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response. Following engagement with the Chief Officers of Community Healthcare Organisations CHO 3 (North Tipperary) and CHO 5 (South Tipperary), I wish to advise as follows;

CHO 3 – North Tipperary

All patients who are considered to be in need of an Orthodontic assessment are referred from the Primary Care Dental Service following their 6th Class dental examination. 100% of patients are seen for assessment within 6 months of referral and 75% of patients are seen within 3 months of referral, which is within the national target and represents a significant improvement in access to the service for assessment. Previously many patients had experienced a significant waiting time for Orthodontic assessment.

In cases where the referring clinician considers that the patient is in need of more urgent intervention or where there is a suspicion regarding the presence of pathology, patients may be referred for an Orthodontic opinion outside of the standard referral pathway. Such patients are seen within 4 to 12 weeks depending on the reason for referral. This protocol also has improved patient access to the service and has minimised the delay for a patient being able to avail of an Orthodontic opinion.

For those patients who are considered to be eligible for HSE Orthodontic treatment in accordance with the Modified IOTN Eligibility Guidelines, patients with evidence of significant oral pathology are given priority and immediate access to Orthodontic treatment.

Patients who have a skeletal component to their malocclusion and who are considered to be suitable for functional appliance (growth modification) therapy are seen for treatment within 3 to 6 months of assessment. This protocol again represents an improvement in patient access to the service in that in the past; only the most severe cases were offered functional appliance therapy. Such early intervention is very desirable as, in most cases; it reduces the overall duration of active Orthodontic treatment.

Standard fixed appliance cases are called for treatment in accordance with date of assessment and unfortunately, given the demands on the service, many experience a significant waiting time for treatment. In accordance with waiting list protocol, priority is given to the more complex Grade 5 patients.

Orthodontics differs from other clinical disciplines in that a course of treatment takes on average 18 to 24 months to complete. The more complex Orthodontic/ Surgical cases can take significantly longer. Therefore, Orthodontic waiting lists cannot simply be interpreted in terms of chronology but rather in terms of the high volume of patients in active treatment at any given time, the complexity of the cases and, as a corollary, the time taken to complete treatment.

The Orthodontic Service in North Tipperary is currently working to full capacity in terms of caseload within the availability of workforce and resources and the delay in patients being able to access the service is a reflection of the very high number of complex cases in active treatment at this time

In 2016/2017, the National Orthodontic Waiting List Initiative permitted the outsourcing of the less complex Grade 4 patients to private service providers. This Initiative had a very positive effect on our waiting list in North Tipperary as in other areas of the Mid West. Continued and increased funding for this Initiative would be highly desirable and would lead to a significant reduction in the waiting time for treatment within the HSE Orthodontic Service.

Patients who are on Orthodontic waiting lists can also access Orthodontic treatment in another EU jurisdiction under the Cross Border Directive on Healthcare. Patients and their parents/ guardians are advised of this scheme at the time of assessment and full details are available for patients on request

CHO 5 – South Tipperary

CHO 5 has examined the matter and the following response outlines the current position. In South Tipperary there are a total of 819 patients waiting for treatment. There is one full time specialist in Clonmel and one Consultant clinic per fortnight for assessments, reviews and supervision. The waiting list for assessments is 11 months with 460 patients waiting to be assessed.

An orthodontic waiting list initiative to deal with long waiting times for access to orthodontic treatment commenced in 2016. The waiting list initiative is offered to the longest waiters on the Category Grade 4d waiting list (categorised as per the Modified Index of Orthodontic Treatment Need), typically those who are waiting 3 or more years for treatment

As a measure to reduce the waiting lists, the HSE has included Orthodontic treatment in the list of treatments available under the Cross Border Directive. Patients may access orthodontic treatment outside the state and can be reimbursed by the HSE. More detailed information on Cross Border Directive is available on the HSE website. The Cross Border Directive Office or National Contact Point is contactable by phone at 056 7784546 or email at crossborderdirective@hse.ie.

Please be assured that Management from HSE and personnel from the Orthodontic service monitor the waiting list on an ongoing basis in the overall context of available resources and prioritization criteria.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,



Joseph Green
AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations