



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

22nd October 2019

Deputy Richard Boyd-Barrett TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

Rannan na nOspideil Ghearmhíochaine
Aonad 4A – Áras Dargan
An Ceantar Theas
An Bothar Mileata
Cill Mhaighneann
BÁC 8

Acute Operations
Health Service Executive
Unit 4A - The Dargan Building
Heuston South Quarter
Military Road
Kilmainham
Dublin 8.

PQ 40744/19 * *To ask the Minister for Health if he will consider purchasing an upright MRI scanner here and failing that if he will allow patients in need of an upright MRI scan to travel to the UK and reclaim the full cost under the treatment abroad scheme which currently does not cover it as it is only available in a private clinic in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

Dear Deputy Boyd-Barrett,

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 National Clinical Programme for Radiology has advised in relation to upright or stand-up MRI machines that its clinical application is:

- (1) For claustrophobic patients;
- (2) For imaging in the physiological position, or in the position that provokes the patient's symptoms.

However, I am further advised that:

- 1) Claustrophobic patients can be catered for in other ways, e.g.

- In conventional MRI scanners with pharmaceutical assistance (i.e. sedation): this is the first method employed in the majority of hospitals in Ireland; if this method fails then the patient can be referred to a facility with one of the following types of scanner:

- In short bore scanners (where the patient's head is not enclosed in the tunnel),
- In wide bore scanners (where there is more space for the patient's head inside the tunnel), in open-ring magnets.

There are several short-bore and wide-bore scanners in Ireland.

- 2) Upright or stand up MRI machines are useful for imaging in the physiological position, or in the position that provokes the patient's symptoms. However, these scanners are less useful for many of the more frequently performed types of MRI examinations (e.g. head/brain, peripheral joints, abdomen, pelvis, cardiac).

There is not a high level of demand for these types of MRI examinations from referring Clinicians. They are more expensive than conventional scanners and at the moment they probably do not represent good value for money for the Irish public healthcare system.

The National Clinical Programme for Radiology would not recommend the allocation of funding for these types of MRI scanners at the current time. That position will be subject to review as technology improves.

In relation to whether patients in need of an upright MRI scan can travel to the UK and claim back the cost of the scan, the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) have advised as follows:

The basis for TAS is EU Regulation 883/2004 and this EU Regulation covers, among other matters, the mutual use of Member State's healthcare for 'insured' EU workers, their dependents and pensioners across the EU, to assist their 'free movement' within the Union. As such this means the 'public' healthcare provided in a Member State which the workers social insurance contributions entitle them to. The scheme is operated in all Member States of the EU in this way. This means that in order to access the public healthcare system of another Member State using TAS a person resident here is required to be in the Irish public health system.

This requirement to be in the public health system is an EU obligation arising from Regulation 883/2004. Therefore the TAS may only cover access to healthcare in the public healthcare system of another EU/EEA country or Switzerland, access to private healthcare is not provided for in the legislation.

However, in 2013 the EU introduced the Cross Border Directive. The CBD allows public patients in Ireland access necessary care in either the public or private sector in the EU or EEA countries. The patient pays for the treatment upfront and is reimbursed at the cost of the treatment in Ireland. MRIs are outpatient attendances therefore the reimbursement rate would be €130.

I trust this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Carol Ivory
General Manager, Acute Operations