



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

10th June 2020

Deputy Róisín Shortall 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 9153/20* *To ask the Minister for Health the consideration he has given to moving medical appointments into health centres during Covid-19 in order that safe social distancing can be maintained in accident and emergency departments.*

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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.

While Emergency Departments provide services to patients who are seriously ill or injured, attendees regularly require access to diagnostic imaging, laboratory testing and consultant oversight which may involve referral to other specialist teams. Patients with medical appointments generally attend at an Outpatients Department (OPD) and are not seen in the Emergency Department unless referred there by their treating Consultant.

As you are aware, in the context of COVID-19, there has been a significant reduction in all scheduled care activity across all Acute Services including outpatient clinics, inpatient and day case procedures. This is in line with the National Action Plan on COVID-19 (page 20). <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/47b727-government-publishes-national-action-plan-on-covid-19/>

Information relating to individual Hospitals and the disruption is available on the HSE website at <https://www2.hse.ie/services/hospital-service-disruptions/hospital-service-disruptions-covid19.html>

This reduction in activity was to ensure patient safety and that all appropriate resources, both physical and human, are made available for COVID-19 related activity. Time-critical essential work continues throughout the system in line with the National Action Plan, Clinical Programme and World Health Organisation recommendations.

Further information around specific clinical areas has been made available by the National Clinical Programmes and is available at <https://hse.drsteevenslibrary.ie/Covid19V2/acute>

Arising from the NPHE decision in early May regarding resumption of services and aligned with the roadmap for reopening society and business, Phase 1 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad5dd0-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-may-18-phase-1/#health-and-social-care>, interim guidance has been developed in the context of schedule care for the resumption of services for outpatients. In order to maintain outpatients services in line with the guidance, the focus has been on virtual activity in the first instance. Acute Operations undertook a body of work to support mobilising and expanding the use of Telehealth for OPD services to support virtual consultations in Acute Hospitals. The technology can be used for other virtual engagements as required. As part of this process there has been extensive work with the office of the OCIO and members of the Telemedicine steering group established as part of the COVID response.

To date 35 sites have been facilitated with access to the selected national telehealth solution 'Attend Anywhere'. The OCIO are facilitating licences and training for these sites currently. In addition, there are a number of local solutions also in place in hospitals that are supporting virtual health engagements. Online demonstrations are being facilitated for hospital groups, hospitals and others who require information or training. There has been a high uptake throughout hospitals. .

OPD virtual activity figures for March submitted initially indicated 34,226 virtual outpatient consultations took place. More recent data for shows 36,978 virtual outpatient consultations took place in March; this represents returns from 31 sites. Data for April shows a total of 80,730 virtual outpatient consultations took place. This represents approximately 50% of the overall OPD activity for April and includes data collected from 36 sites. Of the patients seen 10,379 were new patients, the DNA rates recorded for virtual activity is reported at less and 3%.

As the interim guidance has now been issued through the CCO's office around resumption of services, with appropriate COVID related precautions, scheduled care activity is now commencing services within our acute hospitals are actively looking at all opportunities that will support service delivery including use of private facilitates and potential services being delivered in the community being explored.

I trust this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



PP Trish King
General Manager – Acute Operations Scheduled Care