



17 November 2020

Deputy Bernard Durkin
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 33787/20 To ask the Minister for Health his plans to alleviate the waiting times being imposed on children and their parents when availing of State-provided orthodontic care; his plans to tackle the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter

Dear Deputy Durkin,

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

Patients and their parents face huge difficulties in accessing orthodontic treatment with the HSE. These difficulties are expressed through the very high numbers waiting for assessment, and in both the numbers waiting for treatment and the length of time waiting for treatment. The predominant causative factor is lack of treatment capacity in the service.

Orthodontic treatment with the HSE Orthodontic Service is limited to those children with the most severe and complex orthodontic treatment needs. A Modified Index of Treatment Needs (Modified IOTN) system is used to determine if a child can be accepted for treatment.

Table 1 details KPI data end Q3 2020 for the HSE Orthodontic Service.

	In Active Treatment	Waiting < 2 years	Waiting 2-4 years	Waiting > 4 years	Totals
Former East Coast (Loughlinstown)*		481	447	152	1080
Former South West (St James's)*	2,261	935	1073	327	2335
Midlands*	604	No data available	No data available	No data available	No data available
DNE	1,558	1,032	722	493	2247
South	2,255	1,360	792	89	2241
South East	1,063	853	1335	811	2999
Mid Western	1,463	555	840	328	1723
North West	742	473	212		685
Western	2,093	1,048	716	239	2003
Totals	12,039	6737	6137	2439	15313

Table 1: *Data for Former East Coast (Loughlinstown)*Former South West (St James's)* and Midlands* as at Q2 2020

Impact of COVID -19 on the HSE Orthodontic Services

There has been a significant reduction in treatment capacity in HSE Orthodontic Services due to the effects of curtailment of services during the Covid-19 pandemic. The service continued to be reduced as staff were redeployed to testing and tracing. The effects of reduced service are twofold:

1. Reduced clinical time means backlog in appointments for the patients who were under treatment at the outbreak of the pandemic and who had their treatment interrupted, many for periods in excess of 4 months.
2. During the curtailment of services no new patients were seen for orthodontic assessment:
 - Number of patients on the assessment waiting list end of December 2019 = 9194
 - Number of patients seen for assessment within 6 months end of March 2020 = 1394
 - Number of patients seen for assessment within 6 months between March and June = 294
 - Number of patients seen for assessment within 6 months between June and September = 30.

Access to HSE orthodontic services is through referral from Primary Care Dental Services, referrals from 2020 not already in the system will impact on the above numbers awaiting orthodontic assessment.

National Initiatives underway to address Orthodontic waiting lists include:

- Orthodontic Procurement: This was introduced in 2016 and 1702 patients have been transferred for treatment with orthodontic contractors. An additional cohort of patients will be transferred in 2020.
- Recruitment of additional Consultant Orthodontist and Specialist Orthodontists
- Proposed recruitment and deployment of Orthodontic Therapists.
- Prioritisation of care: All orthodontic services prioritise the provision of care for those patients identified as having the greatest needs and the highest risk of developing dental disease.

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