



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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.

19th November 2020

Deputy Jackie Cahill
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2.

PQ 34427/20 *To ask the Minister for Health if the findings of a recent Covid-19 survey by an organisation (details supplied) which held that 44% of respondents with inflammatory arthritis had an appointment with their rheumatologist cancelled or postponed during the pandemic will receive a response; his plans to act to tackle Covid-19 related delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

Dear Deputy Cahill,

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.

In response to your query, there was 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/>

The 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.

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 scheduled care for the resumption of services. This guidance has been

approved by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) and has been issued to all hospital groups/hospitals to support the resumption of patient treatment.

There has been a continued increase in overall OPD and Scheduled Care activity since May 2020. Working within the guidance, ensuring patient and staff safety adds additional constraints on services and it has a rate limiting effect, however figures for July and August and September exceeding 90% of 2019 average OPD consultations. In addition there has been a considerable focus on virtual outpatient consultations, in total since March 2020 490,000 virtual consultations have been reported as taking place since the onset of COVID-19. The HSE also continue to work closely with the NTPF, commissioning OPD activity for patients, particularly those in long waiting categories and through validation to ensure that all resources are best utilised.

In addition, significant funding has been identified through the 2021 estimates process to support access to care. The HSE is working with Hospital Groups to ensure that available additional funding in 2021 is targeted at access to care for patients where care delivery has been affected by the Pandemic.

I trust that the above is of assistance,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Kidd', written in a cursive style.

Robert Kidd
Assistant National Director
Acute Operations