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Deputy Colm Burke, TD  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**RE: PQ 34901/20**

**To ask the Minister for Health the steps his Department will undertake to enable hospital diabetes teams to deliver a higher volume of appointments with their patients utilising remote monitoring solutions (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter**

Dear Deputy Burke,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the above parliamentary question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have consulted with the National Clinical Programme for Diabetes on your question and have been informed that the following outlines the position.

Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, many hospital and community services have transformed the way they are delivering diabetes care, to enhance engagement with all patients. Most diabetes services, including general practice, are offering telephone and virtual consultations as well as face-to-face appointments when required. In some areas, clinics that would have been delivered in the hospital setting are now being delivered in the community, closer to the patient's home. Dietitians and nurses who deliver diabetes self-management education courses are working to make these courses available online, rather than in a face-to-face or group setting. These measures have been employed to maintain diabetes service delivery and to protect the health of patients living with diabetes, as well as healthcare professionals during this global pandemic.

Some key enablers have been implemented nationally to facilitate virtual diabetes reviews, for example:

- The HSE has approved and made available the following telehealth solutions for delivery of virtual clinics, virtual group education or multidisciplinary team meetings: Attend Anywhere; Microsoft Teams; Whats App; and Cisco WebX.
- The Medtronic CareLink System has been approved for use in all HSE acute hospitals. This system is a cloud-based IT system used by paediatric and adult diabetes services. It allows the patient's healthcare provider to access data gathered by a compatible Medtronic device (e.g. Insulin Pumps and Continuous Glucose Monitoring (CGM) machines). The use of this system will facilitate and enhance remote and virtual patient reviews.



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## Flash Glucose Monitoring

For those living with diabetes, monitoring glucose levels on a daily basis is the key to avoiding complications. It is recommended that people on insulin complete a test a minimum of 4 times per day. This level of frequent testing using traditional finger pricking devices can be painful, inconvenient and difficult to achieve as people go about their daily life.

Flash glucose monitoring ('FreeStyle Libre') is carried out via a small sensor that is worn on the upper arm. It measures interstitial fluid glucose levels every minute, with the data stored at intervals of 15 minutes for up to 8 hours. These values can be accessed any time by scanning with a reader or mobile phone. The clinical data gathered by these devices can be uploaded to a secure database which the healthcare provider can then access to inform their assessment and facilitate virtual/remote reviews.

Use of FreeStyle Libre (FSL) has been shown to result in significantly improved glycaemic control, hypoglycaemia awareness and a reduction in hospital admissions. Furthermore, a recent study completed by Diabetes Ireland explored the 'Users experiences of Flash Glucose Monitoring on daily life experiences' and demonstrates the overwhelmingly positive feedback of FSL users with re-occurring themes emerging such as: 'makes life easier', 'improves control' and 'empowers individuals to be more proactive and confident in their diabetes management'.

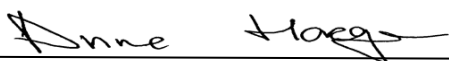
In 2018, in line with the recommendations of the Health Technology Assessment Group (HTAG), the FSL device was made available on an individualised basis to children and young adults with type one diabetes (age 4-21 years) through the Primary Care Reimbursement Scheme (PCRS). It was agreed after twelve months that the situation, including historical strip reimbursement data, would be reviewed to inform a decision regarding further funding / reimbursement of FSL.

Whilst it was anticipated that the review would be finalised at the end of Q1 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in members of the HTAG, whose primary roles are in Public Health Medicine, being redirected fully to public health emergency duties. Currently there is no date for completion of the HTAG review and publication of the advice note.

The National Clinical Programme (NCP) for Diabetes and the RCPI Diabetes Clinical Advisory Group strongly support a broadening of the criteria for coverage by PCRS of the FSL flash glucose monitoring device. The NCP Diabetes has begun discussions with PCRS to explore mechanisms for offsetting the cost of the FSL device by limiting the number of strips made available to patients with type 1 diabetes using the FSL technology.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**Anne Horgan**  
General Manager