



**04 May 2021**

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae  
Dáil Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2**

**PQ 19087/21: To ask the Minister for Health if he will address the issue of orthodontic services and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**Details supplied; Minister we have a very serious issue in relation to the HSE orthodontist. Parents of children who are in need of orthodontic work have been told in the past that there was a 4 year waiting list, this now has escalated to 6 years. They are now trying to blame covid for this but private dentists were able to operate during covid times. This is beyond crazy Minister. Some children are extreme cases altogether and parents unfortunately cannot afford to pay privately for this work. I want you to outline what plans have or will be put in place to help this very important service.**

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

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 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.

Access to dental and orthodontic services was restricted to urgent /emergency treatment under the terms of Statutory Instrument 121/2020 (28th March 2020 -18th May 2020). An emergency dental service was maintained in all HSE service areas throughout this time, which included remote consultation through telephone triage as well as clinical attendance for treatment.

During that time, and since, many HSE orthodontic staff have been redeployed to testing and tracing as part of the HSE's response to the pandemic.

By the end of April 2021, the service had experienced over a year of continual disruption. The impacts can be summarised as follows:

- i. All patients under treatment in March 2020 (approximately 17,000 in active treatment) had their course of treatment interrupted.
- ii. No patients waiting to start treatment were called to commence treatment, with resultant increases in waiting times.

iii. No patients awaiting assessment have been called for assessment, thereby increasing the waiting time for assessments

Orthodontic Services have gradually resumed. All service locations have implemented social distancing and other organisational measures as well as infection prevention and control guidance from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre that has been updated during the pandemic. The initial impact of these measures meant that Orthodontic Units were treating an average of 25 – 40% fewer patients per day than would have been treated prior to the pandemic, but this may improve over time. HSE Orthodontic staff members have been provided with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the pandemic.

In locations where orthodontic services share waiting areas and other facilities, all services are working together to ensure that services are delivered safely and effectively. As part of their resumption plan, each dental and orthodontic area have restarted their screening and treatment service for children. Clinicians have reviewed the records of patients that were under treatment at the time when services were phased down. Priority for early appointments has been given to patients that need to be seen urgently, and following up where necessary on cases that had emergency treatment during the restricted access period.

Full assessment of the impact on waiting lists of the restricted access period, reduced throughput on resumption, and the ongoing commitment to testing on the backlog in service provision is being undertaken. Reducing waiting times is a key priority for the HSE, while at all times ensuring that services implement the organisational.

National Initiatives underway to address Orthodontic waiting lists include:

- Orthodontic Procurement: The total patients transferred from the HSE to private providers under the Framework Type Agreement from 2016 to 2020 inclusive is 2007 patients. A replacement Framework Type Agreement to outsource treatment for Modified IOTN Grade 4 orthodontic patients who have been waiting over 4 years has now completed Invitation to Tender stage. Current funding of €1 million per year provides full treatment costs for approximately 300 patients annually through this mechanism. It is expected to start allocating patients from this Framework in early Q3 2021.
- 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**