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**Date: 15th December 2021**

Deputy Colm Burke TD

Dáil Éireann

Leinster House

Dublin 2

**PQ 59869/21 To ask the Minister for Health if the Government has considered allocating a higher level of funding in the health budget to increase the number of specialist nurses for a variety of different diseases such as Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease and other neurological conditions to ensure that patients have access to the specialist support they need without the necessity to attend outpatient department in hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**PQ 59868/21 To ask the Minister for Health the way his Department and the HSE plans to help decrease the continuously growing number of persons on the neurology outpatient waiting list in Ireland; if a plan can be put in place to employ additional specialist nurses who would liaise with patients and assist them without the requirement of having to attend outpatient departments; 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 the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

**Response:**

Since the onset of COVID in early 2020 to date as each wave of COVID has developed there has been significant disruption to scheduled care activity across Acute Services. In terms of outpatient appointments, cancelled services have been directly as a result

of National Guidance or Hospital decisions that have been made at local level due to infection control risks, staffing challenges linked to COVID, localised outbreaks etc.

as services resumed in 2020 in line with guidance to support scheduled care they are restrictive and have resulted in a reduction in capacity. The restrictions are multifactorial in the context of such elements as workflow, patient pathways, patient engagement and communication, infrastructure, physical distancing, capacity and resources. The capacity available under these measures will vary from one site to the next and indeed from one service to the next.

In the latter part of 2020, as services adapted to new workflows and processes associated with providing care within a COVID environment, the number of patients treated began to increase, however as outlined service provision can be disrupted and impacted by local COVID outbreaks or other conditions as a result of an outbreak.

In addition to the plans made to support Scheduled Care in 2021 initially, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October the Waiting List Action Plan which has been developed has in consultation between the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive, and the National Treatment Purchase Fund was published with full details available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c37dd-the-waiting-list-action-plan/>

The Waiting List Action Plan is aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic and the cyber-attack on scheduled care activity this year.

It has deliverables across 5 areas with specific actions within each area, to be delivered by year end:

- waiting list management
- immediate capacity
- improved modernised pathways
- preparation for the introduction of maximum wait time targets
- data and information

As we head towards 2022 significant funding has been identified through the estimates process to support access to care. The HSE is working with Hospital Groups to ensure that available additional funding is targeted at access to care for patients where care delivery has been affected by the Pandemic.

Additionally measures to ease the requirement for patients to physically attend outpatient appointments have introduced and in 2021 (January to October) over 18000 appointments were held virtually.

I trust this answers your question to your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,



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**Emma Benton**

**General Manager**

**Acute Operations**