



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

02nd March 2021

Deputy Roisin Shorthall
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2.

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.

PQ 8458/21* To ask the Minister for Health the number of outpatient consultant appointments by hospital group which were postponed in January 2021 due to the Covid-19 outbreak; the number that have been rescheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Deputy Roisin Shorthall

Dear Deputy Shorthall,

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.

Response

Since the onset of COVID-19 there has been significant reduction in all scheduled care activity across Acute Services including outpatient clinics, 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/>

Arising from the NPHET 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 was developed in the context of all scheduled services for the resumption of activity including outpatients. 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 scheduled care.

The guidance outlines the measures that need to be undertaken to ensure safety for both patients and staff and varies depending on the type of appointment or treatment the patient is receiving.

These measures were implemented as services resumed in 2020 and they have affected patient pathways in a number of ways. 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, the number of patients being treated in the scheduled care pathway in the early part of 2021 has been affected by the latest surge in COVID-19 and the requirement to prioritise access for time – urgent care.

The HSE does not routinely collect data on cancellations from Hospitals. We have also engaged with the NTPF in this regard and they have advised that, following a review of data provided from Hospitals, the full information to respond to the questions asked is not available. For example, non-waiting list cancellations and OPD return cancellations are not collected. It has also been made clear from engagement with Hospital's that in line with clinical guidance and aligned with other COVID related pressures, they took steps to reduce the number of booked appointments rather than cancel them. In this context, I have attached outpatient activity data for 2019 and 2020 (Appendix 1 below). This will provide a more reliable picture in terms of the impact of COVID on throughput.

The Deputy may be aware that significant funding has been identified in the National Service Plan (NSP) 2021 to support access to care. The HSE is working with Hospital Groups and the NTPF 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 this answers your question.

Yours sincerely,



Robert Kidd
Assistant National Director
Acute Operations

Appendix 1: Outpatient Activity Data by month, New Patients, Return Patients from the Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) for 2019, 2020

Month	2019		2019 Total	2020		2020 Total
	New Patients	Return Patients		New Patients	Return Patients	
January	77,422	214,921	292,343	79,671	220,690	300,361
February	66,457	181,045	247,502	73,771	200,612	274,383
March	74,195	203,109	277,304	49,847	162,655	212,502
April	75,326	210,404	285,730	31,171	138,463	169,634
May	82,872	223,675	306,547	41,167	152,686	193,853
June	68,344	188,901	257,245	54,843	176,925	231,768
July	79,097	220,715	299,812	65,746	201,900	267,646
August	70,923	200,354	271,277	61,914	185,791	247,705
September	77,037	210,676	287,713	75,177	217,231	292,408
October	81,293	223,209	304,502	67,991	200,776	268,767
November	77,850	212,876	290,726	77,557	211,429	288,986
December	61,929	172,289	234,218	63,510	180,490	244,000
Grand Total	892,745	2,462,174	3,354,919	742,365	2,249,648	2,992,013