



**Galway
University
Hospitals**

Ospidéal na h-Ollscoile Gaillimh
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL GALWAY
MERLIN PARK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

February 9th 2021.

PQ Ref.3696/21: To ask the Minister for Health the steps he will take to reduce the outpatient waiting lists for orthopaedic treatment at Merlin Park Hospital, Galway; and if he will take steps to ensure patients can be treated in other hospitals in view of the fact that the number of persons waiting for treatment for over 18 months has more than doubled in the past year.-Noel Grealish

Dear Deputy Grealish,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply to you directly in the context of the request for information referenced above, the following outlines the situation.

The past year has been a challenging year for all clinical services including Orthopaedics as we had to deal with the challenges COVID has presented. Outpatient activity was significantly curtailed during April, May and June and currently we need to keep numbers reduced so as to facilitate social distancing, this unsurprisingly has led to a significant increase in the number of patients waiting, a large number of whom have now waited +18 months.

The +18 Months increase is a higher percentage than the overall increase, this is explainable through the need the focus on urgent patients not seen during the first lockdown.

One of the key challenges (prior to COVID) was access to the second Theatre at Merlin Park, as this operating capacity has been unavailable since September 2017, there had to be a corresponding drop off in outpatient activity. In terms of recovering the position, plans are now in place for the replacement of the second Theatre in Merlin Park and also to re-align the outpatient plan with the recovered capacity in Theatres, which will come on stream late 2021/early 2022.

In regards to decanting patients to other hospitals in the group, unfortunately we also have challenges with Orthopaedic outpatient waiting times in our other hospitals. In terms of accessing capacity in the private hospitals, NTPF at present do not outsource outpatients, however we have been informed that over the coming year this may be introduced into the outsourcing process.

We continue to operate our very successful Physio led MSK Triage process, whereby the patients are seen first by a Physiotherapist and directed from there to the most appropriate care pathway, if surgery is indicated they will be referred to a Consultant, if non-surgical interventions are indicated then they will be moved on this pathway. This pathway reduces the number of patients being added to the Consultant waiting lists and does provide quicker access for many of our patients.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Kane
Chris Kane

General Manager, Galway University Hospital