



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Airgeadais
Feidhmeannacht na
Seirbhíse Sláinte
Seomra 125, Ospidéal
Dr. Steevens
BÁC 8

Office of the Chief Financial Officer
Health Service Executive
Room 125, Dr Steevens
Hospital
Dublin 8

27th January 2021

Deputy Imelda Munster TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re PQ 44907 20: *To ask the Minister for Health the period of time under GDPR regulations a hospital must wait before passing the contact details for a patient whose bill remains unpaid to a debt collection agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

Dear Deputy Munster,

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. Your PQ above has been referred to me for response.

Debt collection continues to be managed at a local level. The shortcomings in the HSE legacy financial systems are well acknowledged and their replacement by a single standard financial system for the Health Sector is at the core of the Finance Reform programme initiated by the Department of Health.

Patients who attend at public hospitals are, depending on their eligibility, and subject to certain exemptions, liable to statutory charges. These are levied under the provisions of the 1970 Health Act. The charges are €100 for an Emergency Department attendance and €80 for an overnight stay, the latter charge is capped at €800 in any 12 month period. The HSE has a statutory obligation to levy and collect these charges and Hospitals have the discretion to operate payment plans where appropriate.

Further information on Hospital Charges is available on the HSE website at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/patient-care/hospital-charges>

HSE policy and procedures for debt collection are covered by NFR 25(National Financial Regulations) which is available to view on the HSE website on the link below:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/financial%20regulations/nfr25.pdf>

Hospitals are required, under NFR 25, to refer an unpaid debt to a collection agency after a period of time from date of billing. It is therefore possible that the patient is still undergoing treatment when this referral takes place.

If any patient has difficulty paying a hospital bill the regulations allow for the hospital and the patient to agree an installment arrangement. We would advise they contact their hospital directly to discuss this on a one to one basis.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on activity in public hospitals, particularly in the period March to May. During that time, non-urgent elective surgery was cancelled on NPHET advice; and some activity was displaced into private hospitals. It is also important to note that patients suffering from COVID-19 were exempt from statutory charges. All of these factors would have led to a decrease in billable statutory charges in that period.

The HSE seeks to maximise the recovery of income in a socially responsible, ethical, efficient and cost effective way.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at sarah.anderson1@hse.ie or tel: 087 9423319.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Anderson

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