



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

12 April 2021

Deputy Richard Bruton
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 11999/21 *To ask the Minister for Health if hospitals have protocols in place governing the activity of debt collectors pursuing outstanding medical bills in order that there would be reasonable practices respecting the stress that some patients are under.*

Dear Deputy Bruton,

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 HSE for response.

The Health (Amendment) Act 2013 amends the Nursing Homes Support Scheme Act 2009 and the Health Act 1970 in order to update provisions on charges and contributions in respect of acute in-patient services in public hospitals, public nursing homes and other residential settings. In all cases where a charge is due, in accordance with the legislation, hospitals have a statutory obligation to raise and pursue that charge.

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

I am advised by the Hospital Groups that debt collection is managed at a local hospital level. If any patient has difficulty paying a hospital bill the regulations allow for the hospital and the patient to agree an instalment arrangement. The HSE seeks to maximise the recovery of income in a socially responsible, ethical, efficient and cost effective way.

The standard practice for debt collection is to issue reminders of outstanding debts to patients before referral to a debt collection agency. The quantity and frequency of these reminders varies between hospital groups and individual hospitals but generally debt collection agencies are not contacted until the debt in question has been outstanding for at least 6 weeks and no communication has been received from the patient or where no payment plan has been agreed between the patient and hospital.

Hospital Groups are mindful in implementing these processes that patients may be experiencing stress and/or financial challenges and encourage patients who are having

difficulties fulfilling their debt to make contact with the hospital to whom the debt is owed in order to make alternative payment arrangements. If hospitals are made aware or become aware of such challenges, agreements may be reached between the patient and hospital on a case by case basis and debt collectors are not included in the process.

I trust that this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Carol Ivory
General Manager
Acute Operations