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20th April 2021

Re. PQ17014/21: To ask the Minister for Health the number appointments for cancer screening, diagnostics, treatments or routine and follow-up appointments that have been cancelled or postponed since March 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Tóibín

The NCCP does not collect data on scheduling; cancelled or postponed appointments are a matter for the hospitals.

The ongoing pandemic, and in particular the current third wave, has resulted in sustained challenge to the health services. Some clinics and diagnostic services are not yet operating at pre-pandemic capacity due to factors including challenges associated with requirements for physical distancing and infection prevention and control, and insufficient capacity for pre-pandemic levels of non-COVID care in the public system. Additional resourcing in the HSE Winter Plan and the private hospital agreement aim to address some of these challenges and increase capacity for non-COVID health care. From the hospitals perspective, COVID-19 is an evolving situation and the current hospital COVID-19 update is that the situation is improving in the cancer centres.

Invitations to cervical, breast and bowel screening have been paused at times of peak community transmission of COVID-19, in line with NPHE and government advice. This is similar to the approach taken internationally. The activity of the screening programmes has also been closely monitored, to ensure that capacity is available for the investigation of higher risk patients and of those presenting with symptoms.

Yours sincerely



Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide
National Director
National Cancer Control Programme