



25 November 2021

Deputy Colm Burke
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ56396/21: To ask the Minister for Health if the appropriate endoscopy capacity is being provided in hospitals to allow for the expansion of BowelScreen to all persons aged between 55 to 74 years of age by year end 2021 as is recommended in the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

The National Cancer Strategy 2017 - 2026 states that the expansion of BowelScreen to all aged 55 to 74 should begin from 2021.

There is approximately a 4% increase in demand every year for GI endoscopy services each year. In 2021, capacity for GI endoscopy services has been sought through a range of measures including:

- 'Safety net' agreements with private hospitals during periods of COVID-19 surge
- Capacity in the private sector through National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) commissioning.
- Increasing the use of capacity in endoscopy units by carrying out procedures at weekends.
- Additional capacity in limited circumstances through the use of mobile endoscopy rooms.
- Funding for nurse-led triage post as well as interventions such as FIT testing for symptomatic patients and capsule endoscopy received some funding in 2021. This overall investment in endoscopy services will in time, equate to a reduction on demand in existing services therefore releasing capacity.
- Additional workforce is a key requirement in order to increase the capacity of endoscopy units to deliver additional procedures. A bid has been submitted to Department of Health for endoscopy workforce through the 2022 estimates process.

In 2021, National Screening Services began implementation planning with initial funding provided by the Government for a one-year increase in age-range. This would see BowelScreen screening men and women aged 59 to 69.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we have a considerable challenge in managing our current age cohort within capacity constraints. We envisage that this will continue for some time. We are working with our host hospitals to maximise available capacity for screened patients, and looking at ways to extend capacity into the longer-term.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.





An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

Fiona Murphy
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