



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

10th November 2021

Deputy Peadar Tóibín,
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
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Heuston South Quarter
Military Road
Kilmainham
Dublin 8.

PQ 49678/21* To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons who have had colposcopy appointments delayed, postponed or cancelled since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic

Dear Deputy Tóibín,

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.

Response

Since the onset of COVID-19 there has been an impact and reduction in scheduled care activity across Acute Services. The National Action Plan on COVID-19 which was issued as part of the response to the first wave of COVID refers to same on page 20. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/47b727-government-publishes-national-action-plan-on-covid-19/>.

During each wave of pandemic where rates of COVID were high in the community and prevalence high in Hospitals, scheduled care activities have been reduced, for both the safety of patients and staff. These reductions prioritised particular patient cohorts for access with a focus on ensuring that urgent and time critical patient appointments were maintained. This approach was also supported by guidance issued by Clinical Programmes providing Specialty level guidance which varies depending on the type of appointment or treatment the patient was planned for.

In addition to surgeries and medical treatments that were postponed in line with the guidance, there were other factors that impacted ongoing service provision/patient treatment over this period including:

- Infrastructural challenges which resulted in the physical capacity reducing due to social distancing, infection control requirements etc. Of note it has also been made clear from engagement with Hospital's that in line with clinical guidance and aligned with other COVID related pressures, where possible,

they took steps to reduce the number of booked appointments rather than cancel them.

- Impact of COVID outbreaks in hospitals such as staffing shortages as a result of COVID outbreaks/close contacts etc.
- Impact on COVID prevalence in the community resulted in patients not being in a position to attend for planned appointments as they may have had COVID or were identified as a close contact

The Deputy may be aware that significant funding has been identified in the National Service Plan (NSP) 2021 to support access to care. The HSE is working with Hospital Groups and the NTPF to ensure that available additional funding in 2021 is targeted at access to care for patients where care delivery has been affected by the Pandemic. In addition, as part of NSP 2022 Scheduled Care remains a key focus.

As part of the process to respond to your query specifically in relation to colposcopy appointments engagement took place directly with the National Women and Infants Health Programme who advised that they do not have data reported /collated centrally on colposcopy appointments delayed, postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) have advised that they are not in a position to provide the requested cancellation data, as within their remit they do not collect and collate cancellation activity, namely; numbers treated /cancellations, etc.

In terms of cancellation data generally and in this instance, there are challenges arising with the data collected by the NTPF, not all hospitals return cancellation information thus impacting a true reflection of overall numbers. In addition, there are a number of caveats related to data validity and furnishing this data would not provide an accurate reflection of the cancellation status nationally. The NTPF have advised that releasing data that is heavily caveated is not ideal as these caveats are often missed or misunderstood, therefor in this instance the data is not available.

I trust that this answers your question.



Trish King
General Manager
Acute Operations