



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

3rd November 2021

Deputy Catherine Murphy TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re PQ 50378 21: *To ask the Minister for Health the number of debt collectors and or debt collecting agencies engaged by the HSE in 2019, 2020 and to date in 2021 in respect of the collection of fees and charges on patients; the yield raised by these agents in respect of their tasks; the number that have involved litigation proceedings; the policy in respect of hiring debt collection agents; and if there is a policy in place for providing a system in which a schedule of payments can be set out.*

Dear Deputy Murphy,

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.

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.

The number of debt collection companies used by the HSE in the years 2019 and 2020 was 5, 2020 being the most recent period for which this data is readily available. The data was sourced from the HSE Regional Finance ledger payments records and is for HSE statutory services only.

In relation to your question regarding *'the yield raised by these agents in respect of their tasks;'* and *'the number that have involved litigation proceedings'*, I must inform you that as debt collection continues to be managed at a local level this type of data is not captured centrally within the HSE and is therefore not available.

Debt collection continues to be 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. We would advise they contact their hospital directly to discuss this on a one to one basis.

Hospital Groups have advised that 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on activity in public hospitals, with non-urgent elective surgery cancelled at times on NPHET advice; and some activity was displaced into private hospitals. It is also important to note that patients suffering from COVID-19 are exempt from statutory charges.

The HSE seeks to maximise the recovery of income in a socially responsible, ethical, efficient and cost effective way. It should be noted that the collection of monies owed is a continuous, daily and large scale process.

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
General Manager Corporate Finance
National Finance Division, HSE
Email: sarah.anderson1@hse.ie
Tel: 087 9423319