



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

18 February 2022

Deputy Peadar Tóibín
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ5826/22 To ask the Minister for Health the position regarding the national cervical screening laboratory which was due to commence construction in January 2021; if delays in construction have been encountered; the costs of construction to date; the projected costs of the project; when the laboratory will open; if he plans to cease the outsourcing of CervicalCheck smears and slides to foreign laboratories when the new laboratory is opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Questions.

National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL)

Construction of the NCSL commenced on-site at the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital in early January 2021 and has proceeded as planned. Construction of the new laboratory is due to be completed in the second quarter of 2022. The laboratory is due to be operational in quarter three of 2022 following fit-out, commissioning of equipment, adherence to CervicalCheck quality assurance standards and accreditation received by INAB.

The construction funding allocation for the project is €15m. Expenditure is currently within the agreed budget.

It is envisaged that the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital will be the principal provider of cervical screening laboratory services for the National Screening Service. This will enable a better balance between public and private laboratory capacity provision and enable NSS to reduce the dependency on third party providers to meet the needs of the national cervical screening programme. Although there has been very good progress made, it will still take a number of years to fully implement, primarily due to the challenge of retaining and recruiting suitably qualified staff.

Laboratory providers

CervicalCheck uses two quality-assured laboratory providers to process its cervical screening samples. These are Quest Diagnostics in the USA, and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) in Dublin. The laboratories perform HPV primary testing and reflex cytology testing. The quality assurance requirements and standards for the cervical screening programme are based on European guidance, as set out in the European guidelines for quality assurance in cervical cancer screening, and our Standards for Quality Assurance in Cervical Screening.

We use a laboratory provider in the US because there are not enough quality-assured labs available in Ireland to meet our needs, and to ensure resilience in our system. COVID-19 and the two cyber attacks in 2021 have demonstrated that having an alternative laboratory where samples can be processed has benefited the women of Ireland as the programme continued providing a high quality service.

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An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cioch
The National Breast Screening Programme



AN CLÁR NÁISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Púitige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Retine do Dhiabaitigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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Recruitment

The recruitment of medical pathology consultants/ medical scientists for the new NCSL is an ongoing challenge. Retaining staff numbers in the face of increased market demand (COVID-19) and continued decline of the cytology industry globally have added to the difficulties. The NCSL is actively recruiting and will enable the training and development of resources specialising in cervical screening services. There remains a risk, in that Ireland's medico-legal environment for screening may deter clinicians from participating in the programmes.

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

Fiona Murphy
Chief Executive
National Screening Service

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