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11th March 2022

Re. PQ 11327/22: To ask the Minister for Health the percentage of patients triaged as urgent who are offered an appointment within ten working days of the date of receipt of a letter of referral in the cancer office; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cullinane

The National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the above PQ.

The NCCP collect data on the following access key performance indicators to the symptomatic breast disease clinics (SBD) across the eight cancer centres and Letterkenny satellite hospital:

Urgent Breast New Attendance	Metric	Oct '21	Nov '21	Dec '21
National	%	52.0%	49.9%	58.9%
	N	2,305	2,507	1,766

Table 1 – The total number of new patients triaged as urgent (N) by the cancer centre attending symptomatic breast disease clinics and the % attended/offered an appointment within the recommended timeframe of 10 working days from receipt of referral.

Each of the SBD Clinics nationally provide Triple Assessment Clinics (TACs) to patients referred. These clinics offer a three step process to help diagnose breast complaints. Not everyone needs all three steps. Sometimes all three steps happen on one day, sometimes on different days.

Step 1: The patient is examined by a doctor in the clinic and a full medical history is recorded.

Step 2: In the breast imaging section a mammogram (x-ray of the breast) and/ or an ultrasound scan is provided.

Step 3: Some people will also need a breast biopsy.

All the national **Symptomatic Breast Disease (SBD) clinics** remained open and accepted referrals during the Covid-19 Pandemic crises (waves 1-3); in the initial period, priority was given to the patients triaged as Urgent as this patient cohort has a high suspicion of malignancy. All Symptomatic Breast clinics have

identified Covid-19 related patient backlogs and are actively addressing these backlogs with additional clinics, extended clinics and in some units access to mammography first.

After consultant-led assessment some patients will require further diagnostic investigations appropriate to their individual needs.

Yours sincerely



Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide
National Director
National Cancer Control Programme