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Deputy Smyth  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ Ref 25125/22 To ask the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost to increase the number of specialist endometriosis services to four nationally for each region; including supports for specialist surgeons and a dedicated pathway to surgery**

Dear Deputy Smyth

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Endometriosis is a difficult condition to diagnose and treat because of the variation of presentations, impacting the physical and mental wellbeing of patients at varying levels. Diagnosing endometriosis is made even more challenging because the condition does not only arise in the pelvic area but also in other parts of the body. Classic symptoms include premenstrual pain, painful menstruation, painful intercourse, infertility, pain in the abdomen, lower back, pelvis, and pain when passing stool. However, others who have endometriosis may experience few or no symptoms. The time to diagnose endometriosis varies by patient due to its varying and ambiguous symptomology. The key aim of treatment is to relieve symptoms so that the condition does not interfere with day-to-day life for patients. Broadly speaking, treatment may include pain medications, hormone treatment and surgical interventions. The different types of surgery for endometriosis span from the most minor laparoscopic procedure that will be carried out on a day-case basis to both diagnose and treat endometriosis that is early in development, to an extensive multi-disciplinary team-based approach for severe endometriosis. The most complex of cases may require involvement of other specialties like general surgery and urology.

The National Women and Infants Health Programme (NWIHP) have this year secured funding via the Department of Health and the Women's Health Taskforce to support the establishment of a National Supra-regional Service. This Model of Care is currently in development, and NWIHP see the development of care in this area as a priority action for 2022. NWIHP are working with key stakeholders and specialists in the area of endometriosis in this regard. While the Model of Care is currently undergoing consultation, NWIHP have identified several principles that will guide the development of this model. Namely, NWIHP recognises that the range of symptoms experienced by a woman may not always correlate with the staging of disease and in fact, some women with mild endometriosis may experience symptoms far more extreme and debilitating. The same can be said for those with severe or high-grade disease but who experience minimal side-effects. The proposed Model

of Care will represent a shift in the traditional approach to the management of endometriosis, focusing on the management of chronic pain and presenting a holistic approach to care, ensuring that the correct health care professionals are positioned to manage the extent of a woman's related symptoms.

It is the position of NWIHP and the HSE that an entirely surgical approach may not be suitable for all women with confirmed or suspected endometriosis. In fact, surgery alone may only partially address a woman's symptoms and disease may reoccur in 20 – 40% of cases post-surgery. The NWIHP therefore will prioritise the availability of multi-disciplinary resources to include physiotherapy, dietetics, pain management specialists and psychologists to manage the broad spectrum of symptoms associated with this condition.

The Model of Care will see the establishment of two supra-regional services, one in Dublin and one in Cork, that will be positioned to deal with the most severe cases requiring complex surgery. Discharge from the specialist service will be facilitated such that women will be able to avail of a continuum of care and access supportive services as needed at local level. Currently, it is projected that two such specialist centres will meet the expected demand of severe cases requiring this level of specialist care. In 2022, NWIHP anticipate that circa €2.5 million will be invested in the development of endometriosis services.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



**Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme**