

22nd September 2022

Deputy Thomas Pringle TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

RE: PQ 42313/22

To ask the Minister for Health the number of inpatients or inpatient day cases attending hospitals managed by Dublin Midlands Hospital Group with unpaid fees and charges for inpatient/day services whose debt was referred to a debt collection agency in each of the years 2017 to 2021; in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Pringle,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

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.

Hospitals are required, under HSE National Financial Regulation, NFR 25, to refer any unpaid debt to a collection agency after a period of time from date of billing. 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.

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 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.

Hospitals	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Midland Regional Hospital Tullamore	2768	3607	2938	3170	3640
Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise	811	828	1031	795	547
Naas General Hospital	861	937	1076	776	811
Tallaght University Hospital	5734	4112	3679	2545	5451
St James's Hospital	2403	1181	2356	2811	2013

*Please be advised that the Coombe Women & Infants University Hospital will reply directly to you in relation to this query.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours Sincerely



Mr Trevor O' Callaghan
Chief Executive Officer