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**Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2**

PQ Number 17555/23: To ask the Minister for Health the steps his Department is taking to shorten significant delays in waiting lists for dental treatments for school children which require general anaesthesia to provide a service that assists the most vulnerable in society; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Murnane O' Connor,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for reply.

The Dental General Anaesthetic (GA) is organised through the HSE Public Dental Service. Patients are referred by their dentist to be placed on to a GA waiting list which is held in Primary Care. Scheduling a GA requires access to an operating theatre, an anaesthetist, nursing and dental theatre staff including Dental Surgeons, dental team members and support and recovery staff.

Late referrals to secondary care and prolonged reduced access to general anaesthesia were enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many services slow to resume, some with reduced capacity. The impact of mitigation measures against Covid-19 on at risk groups led to reduced attendance for routine and preventive services.

The following details initiatives underway at present to address general anaesthesia waiting lists:

- The Connolly Hospital Dental General Anaesthetic Unit is currently under development. When fully operational, this unit will manage the dental General Anaesthetic waiting list for CHOs 6, 7 and 8. The capacity of the service will meet the needs of the children referred for dental extractions with minimal waiting times.
- The National Oral Health Office is engaging with HSE integrated care and HSE Acutes to increase capacity and improve access to timely GA services.
- Prioritisation of care: All dental GA services prioritise the provision of care for those patients identified as having highest risks and greatest need.
- Upskill HSE Dental staff in Inhalation Sedation and Intravenous Sedation as alternatives to general anaesthesia (GA).

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nader Farvardin', written in a cursive style.

Nader Farvardin,
Interim AND, National Oral Health Lead - Operations