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8th February 2023

Re.

PQ3605/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of urgent eReferrals to breast clinics by month in each of the years 2019 to 2022 and to date 2023, in tabular form.

PQ3604/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of eReferrals to breast clinics by month in each of the years 2019 to 2022 and to date 2023, in tabular form.

PQ3602/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of electronic referrals to lung rapid access clinics by month in each of the years 2019 to in 2023, 2022 and to date in 2023, in tabular form.

PQ3603/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of eReferrals to prostate rapid access clinics by month in each of the years 2019 to 2022 and to date 2023, in tabular form.

PQ3606/23: To ask the Minister for Health the number of GP cancer referrals received electronically as a proportion of overall GP referrals.

Dear Deputy Hourigan,

The number of electronic GP referrals sent to each of the rapid access clinics for 2019-2022 by month is given as follows:

Healthlink GP Electronic Referrals	Total	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<i>Total GP e-referrals to Symptomatic Breast Disease Clinics (SBD)</i>													
2019	35,120	3,317	3,096	3,092	2,846	3,091	2,485	2,736	2,583	2,860	3,471	3,289	2,254
2020	40,394	3,518	3,069	2,073	2,206	3,079	3,350	3,554	3,147	3,803	4,448	4,688	3,459
2021	47,402	3,287	4,335	5,169	4,435	1,766	2,450	3,690	3,524	5,421	4,893	4,970	3,462
2022	47,914	4,488	4,357	3,846	3,694	4,200	3,756	3,377	3,971	4,151	4,291	4,708	3,075
<i>Total GP e-referrals to Rapid Access Lung Clinics (RALC)</i>													
2019	1,722	138	143	141	168	170	129	126	153	128	139	149	138
2020	1,572	207	184	111	85	106	137	104	109	141	122	129	137
2021	1,648	93	138	158	148	57	92	166	157	146	174	169	150
2022	2,365	161	178	201	191	213	191	196	201	180	213	248	192
<i>Total GP e-referrals to Rapid Access Prostate Clinics (RAPC)</i>													
2019	3,481	282	265	278	276	320	284	310	263	285	311	327	280
2020	3,390	306	280	250	155	215	220	282	271	336	324	394	357
2021	3,674	256	246	286	310	139	164	334	314	404	408	451	362
2022	5,122	362	392	408	424	405	426	396	411	450	459	561	428

The referral data presented here represent referrals made electronically by GPs, using the Healthlink system. There are a number of important caveats to be noted in interpreting these data.

1. Patients can be referred to breast, lung and prostate cancer RACs by their GP via an electronic referral system. GPs are not obliged to refer electronically, but a high proportion now do (approximately >95% of GP referrals are electronic since March 2020). Because not all GPs refer electronically, the electronic referral data include only a subset of all GP referrals to RACs. This is especially the case for 2019 e-referral data where the Healthlink electronic GP referral system was not in use in all GP practices, with some GPs still reliant on manual referral by letter, fax or phone.
2. The number of electronic GP referrals to the symptomatic breast disease clinics presented above is for both urgent and non-urgent patient triage streams. It is not possible to distinguish between triage status in Healthlink e-referral data as there is no data sharing agreement to monitor the content of the e-referral messages, only the total number sent.
3. Not every referral to a RAC will be from a GP. This is particularly true for lung cancer, where a patient may be referred by a hospital doctor following attendance at the emergency department or out-patients clinic, or if a patient has an abnormal chest x-ray. Typically, around 50% of attendances at lung RACs are by GP referral.
4. Particularly at peaks of the pandemic, it is possible that some symptomatic lung patients were initially assessed via COVID respiratory pathways.
5. Data prior to 2019 is incomplete and is not available for comparison as the Healthlink GP e-referral system was not yet in use in a significant number of practices.
6. Due to the cyber-attack of May/June 2021, some GP referrals will have been sent manually for the consequent period of IT disruption and may not appear in the tabulated figures above.

Specifically, in relation to PQ 3606/23 (To ask the Minister for Health the number of GP cancer referrals received electronically as a proportion of overall GP referrals) it is estimated that >95% of all GP referrals to the SBD/RAC clinics are now made electronically since March 2020.

Yours sincerely



Patrick Cafferty
Assistant National Director
National Cancer Control Programme

