



**Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta
Géarobríochtaí**

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Deputy David Cullinane, TD

Dáil Éireann

Leinster House

Dublin 2

PQ 32021.23

To ask the Minister for Health to outline the current adult services available for spinal patients; and if he will make a Statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Cullinane

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.

Response:

The National Spinal Injuries Unit (NSIU) is located at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital (MMUH) and provides a national service for patients with acute traumatic spinal cord injury. Protocols are in place for immediate transfer of patients directly to this unit from anywhere in the country for initial management and surgery. The unit has well established links with the National Rehabilitation Hospital (NRH) Dun Laoghaire which provides specialist rehabilitation services. The incidence of acute traumatic spinal cord injury in Ireland is estimated at 50-60 cases per year.

Spinal fractures without injury to the spinal cord are much higher in incidence. When surgery is required these injuries are treated in Cork and Galway regularly and Limerick, Tallaght and Beaumont occasionally.

Non-Surgical Management of Adult Spinal Patients

The vast majority of patients with degenerative spinal conditions do not need review or intervention by a surgical service.

Whilst GPs may refer to primary care physiotherapy, many patients are also referred to orthopaedic, neurosurgical or rheumatology outpatient departments. This is clearly inappropriate for the majority of patients. The increase in numbers presenting to spinal clinics result in longer waiting times for all, including for those patients who require surgery.

The National Musculoskeletal (MSK) Triage initiative which commenced in 2012, is a collaboration between NCPTOS and NCP for Rheumatology. By May 2023, over 230,000 patients have been assessed and managed from OPD waiting lists by clinical specialist physiotherapists under the clinical governance of the consultants. It is estimated that ~ 22% of



all referrals to MSK Triage are associated with low back pain with a conversion rate of 15% for patients from this service requiring a consultation with an orthopaedic surgeon.

An integrated LBP pathway which has been developed by the NCPTOS and NCPR as part of the HSE's suite of modernised care pathways commences piloting on two sites in September 2023. This should over time improve patient access to appropriate treatment thus ensuring that only patients requiring a surgical opinion are scheduled for an OPD appointment.

I trust this answers your question to your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Emma Benton'.

Emma Benton

General Manager

Acute Operations