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26th July, 2023

Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

PQ Ref 33028/23

*To ask the Minister for Health if, given that amounts of €4.3 million and €11.3 million were reimbursed under the Cross Border Directive and the Northern Ireland Planned Healthcare Scheme, respectively in 2022, similar funding will be found for the establishment of a cataract clinic in the CHO4 area, to avoid patients travelling to the North for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. *

Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan

Dear Deputy O’Sullivan,

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

The demand for ophthalmic services, including the treatment of cataracts, has grown in the South/South West region over the last number of years; this is due both to the development of new treatments and the ageing population profile.

The HSE/ South-South West Hospital Group plans to expand capacity within ophthalmology to meet increasing service demands and in line with recommendations in *The National Clinical Programme for Ophthalmology Model of Eye Care (2017)*, and the Reconfiguration of Acute Hospital Services for Cork and Kerry, it was decided that there should be a regional department of ophthalmology. The South Infirmary Victoria University Hospital was chosen as the site best suited for this new Ophthalmology Unit.

Construction works have also been completed in SIVUH on two new theatres, giving an increase of one Ophthalmology Theatre to manage the increased demand. This development will provide an additional Operating Theatre for the service. The new Unit will also include the most modern equipment and will have access to supportive diagnostic technology. The unit is expected to open in 2023. The overall capital cost of this project was €4.55m.

The Ophthalmology Outpatients Department (OPD) and Eye Casualty at Cork University Hospital and the OPD from Mercy University Hospital is expected to transfer to a new Ophthalmology OPD and Eye Casualty building at SIVUH. At present there is no confirmed date for the move. The new Unit will also support continued work with the Regional Eye Care Service based in the Primary Community Care Centre in Ballincollig.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CKCH) South/South West Hospital Group and SIVUH are working collaboratively to develop a Regional Eye Care Service based in the new Primary Community Care Centre located in Ballincollig Cork. This new service will provide a designated specialised infrastructure where all community procedures related to Ophthalmology will be performed and incorporate Multidisciplinary Team working between multiple grades of ophthalmology staff to deliver the best outcomes for both children and adults. This proposal is in alignment with the strategic direction and recommendations of the Primary Care Eye Services Review Group report and the Model of Eye Care under the National Clinical Programme (NCP) for Ophthalmology.

The NCP for Ophthalmology recommends the integration of hospital and community care, with clinicians and care providers working in teams, as the best approach to deliver care for patients and to address the structural deficits in the current system. The efficient operation of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) is critical to the delivery of primary eye care. Implementing a more community based model will improve access to care and will help address the current adult and Paediatric waiting list crisis. A clear governance structure for the Multi-Disciplinary Teams, with clinical audits, will ensure that the standards of clinical care are maintained.

CKCH have been informed of an initial allocation of funding to commence the development of an integrated eye care service in 2023. Although not the full allocation of funding required, the funding is welcomed in developing the initial phases of the services for Cork and Kerry and a steering group is in place between CKCH, SSWHG and SIVUH to commence the operationalisation of an integrated eye care service.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



John R. Higgins,
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Chief Executive Officer,
South/South West Hospital Group.

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