



02/07/2024

Deputy Nolan,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 25888/24: To ask the Minister for Health to address concerns about the absence of endometriosis specialists in Ireland; if he is aware that this shortage is causing acute distress to the many thousands of women who suffer from the condition; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Nolan,

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.

Endometriosis is one of the most common gynaecological conditions in Ireland and approximately 1 in 10 women may have this condition. There is a wide range of symptoms associated with this condition and therefore, the burden of disease varies from person to person.

Some women may have endometriosis that goes undetected, as symptoms are unbothersome, while for others, endometriosis can have a significant impact on a woman's quality of life. Often symptoms are overlapping and women are dealing with chronic pain which is usually caused by a combination of physical, psychological and/or social factors rather than originating from a single underlying condition.

The National Framework developed by NWIHP regarding the management of endometriosis in Ireland aims to represent a change in the approach to the management of endometriosis, recognising and highlighting endometriosis as a priority area for service improvement.

During the course of its work, NWIHP via its Clinical Director had the opportunity to meet with the Endometriosis Association of Ireland (EAI) at a meeting with the Minister. At this meeting NWIHP, in tandem with the NWIHP/ICGP leads for women's health listened to the concerns of the of the EAI representatives.

In devising the Framework, NWIHP have identified an overarching model of care that addresses the specific care pathways for women with endometriosis, whether definitively diagnosed or strongly suspected, once referred into secondary level gynaecology services. The six maternity networks in place will be the basic building blocks upon which this pathway will develop thereby enabling these care pathways to be integrated into existing obstetrics and gynaecological services, with five regional endometriosis hub services and two specialist endometriosis hub services

In developing this Framework and overseeing the investment programme underpinning it, it is recognised by NWIHP that this is the start of a journey in Ireland regarding developing and implementing more robust, structured and resourced care pathways for women with endometriosis. It is important to note that the framework developed was led by the clinical expertise of lead consultants in this area. These leads based on their years of expertise, treatment, management and advocacy for women's health ensure that the framework adopted a holistic approach to care and acknowledges that women with endometriosis experience and manage the condition in an individualised manner.

Surgery for endometriosis can vary from minor day-case procedures to complex surgeries.

Day procedures, such as minor laparoscopies, can be performed by any general gynaecologist in any general gynaecology service and this will have formed part of their specialist-training curriculum under the auspices of the Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

For more complex surgeries for severe endometriosis, which may involve multiple organs, multi-disciplinary input may be required from other specialties e.g. colorectal surgery, urology, and radiology.

The HSE's NWIHP has designed the Framework such that the full spectrum of specialists will be available for the most complex cases within the two supra-regional specialist services.

It is important to note that as part of the structured higher specialist training (HST) programme in place in Ireland for doctors seeking to be consultant obstetrician and gynaecologists, all gynaecologists have received the necessary training and hold the required skillset and expertise to treat and manage endometriosis at a mild-moderate level.

As such, women who attend a gynaecology service for suspected or diagnosed endometriosis, whether at local, regional or specialist level will be under the clinical care of a consultant obstetrician gynaecologist who has undergone the appropriate training and education.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme