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Deputy Michael Healy-Rae  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

***PQ 19958/24 To ask the Minister for Health to invest in the endoscopy workforce capacity and hospital infrastructure (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Michael Healy-Rae***

***Details Supplied: Minister I ask that more investment be put towards the endoscopy work force capacity and hospital infrastructure to allow patients to be able to receive colonoscopies within a valid time frame for an earlier and better diagnosis in the case that bowel cancer may be present.***

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

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.

There are 39 public endoscopy services serving adults and children in both HSE and voluntary hospitals in the Republic of Ireland. The table gives total number of endoscopy procedures performed yearly between 2019 and 2023. These figures include scheduled and unscheduled activity. Scheduled activity include urgent, routine and planned procedures. Unscheduled activity includes inpatient and emergency procedures.

2023	122,296
2022	114,591
2021	103,332
2020	85,471
2019	117,796

Source: HIPE,  
Healthcare Pricing Office

Endoscopy procedures are performed by consultant gastroenterologists and surgeons, specialist gastroenterology and surgical trainees, trainees outside of training schemes and advanced nurse practitioners.

In order to meet the demand for Endoscopy services there are a range of strategies underway, which have increased the endoscopy workforce, including:

- 10 new GI consultant posts have been funded since 2020
- Permanent funding secured in 2021 for 29 triage nurses to be employed in all endoscopy units. The triage nurse is a CNM2 post. The introduction of triage nurses is to support best practice in terms of patient triage and to ensure that patients are appropriately routed on receipt of referral.
- Capsule endoscopy: Capsule endoscopy is a non-invasive procedure currently available in 9 sites in Ireland (an increase of 5 since 2021). Nine capsule nurses have been recruited to support this initiative)



- The NTPF have provided funding for clinical validation roles in endoscopy units to clinically validate patients waiting longer than 13 weeks, or patients waiting for surveillance/planned procedures
- A number of initiatives supported through non-recurrent Access to Care funding, have been developed for alternative care pathways:
  - FIT home test kits: FIT tests are a non-invasive alternative to a colonoscopy, and these are being offered to patients since January 2023. To date over 5,000 patients have had FIT tests instead of going directly for a colonoscopy
  - Urea breath testing: This test is offered to patients as an alternative to a gastroscopy/OGD, the test can be performed in the patient's home or in a clinical setting. Results of these tests can indicate if the patient can be managed through medication or require onward referral for a GI scope
- The Joint Advisory Group on GI Endoscopy (JAG) is the body that accredits endoscopy services in Ireland. 32% (n12) endoscopy units in Ireland are JAG accredited, with a further 57% (n21) engaged in the JAG accreditation process.

There are a number of capital developments, encompassing improved endoscopy, to be progressed in 2024, which will support the delivery of additional activity. The development and delivery of these capital projects in 2024 is subject to the approval and funding of the 2024 National Capital Plan

Since 2020, the following additional infrastructure has been funded:

- Third room under construction in Galway
- One mobile unit provided in Letterkenny University Hospital
- One mobile unit provided in UH Waterford.

I trust this is of assistance to you.

Yours Sincerely,

**Caroline Lynch**  
**General Manager**  
**Acute Operations**