



Mr. Robert O'Donoghue, T.D.
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Email: robert.odonoghue@oireachtas.ie

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PQ 15766/25

To ask the Minister for Health what the current policy is in cancer care centres of excellence regarding the prioritisation of terminal cancer patients requiring life-saving and urgent treatment over patients presenting with non-life-threatening illnesses; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy O'Donoghue,

All hospitals, including the designated cancer centres, manage the competing clinical needs of patients on a constant basis.

Cancer treatment is a priority in all cancer centres. There are also many areas of life-saving and urgent care provided for patients across a range of non-cancer conditions and diseases within the cancer centres, all of which provide a range of acute care.

Treatment for people with cancer is ordinarily guided by treatment plans that are discussed at a multidisciplinary tumour conference and agreed with the individual patient. This treatment plan is refined if required as the treatment progresses, based on ongoing monitoring of the individual patient's cancer and response to treatment.

At times, acute unscheduled care may be required for patients with a cancer diagnosis, due either to the cancer itself or side effects of treatment. The Acute Haematology Oncology Nursing Service, established five years ago, means that cancer patients who are on treatment and become unwell can access a clinical nurse specialist via a dedicated telephone line in any of the 26 centres across the country that deliver systemic anti-cancer therapy. Unwell patients who require additional review or treatment are, where possible, seen in the cancer day care unit or a dedicated space away from the emergency department. This service currently operates within specific hours but the service is expected to expand further in 2025.

As you may be aware, during the COVID-19 pandemic, cancer treatment continued to be prioritised, despite the pressures on the cancer centres and other hospitals providing cancer care during this time. This ethos continues as hospitals address the many challenges of patient care on a daily basis.

Let me know if you require any additional information. If you have a specific query regarding emergency department care in an individual hospital, you may wish to contact the hospital or the relevant HSE Health Region.

Yours sincerely,

Ciara Mellett
General Manager
Office of the National Director
National Cancer Control Programme

