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Fianna Fáil
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PQ 2264/25

To ask the Minister for Health the steps being taken to ensure that any woman at risk of breast cancer receives a correct diagnosis in a timely and efficient manner regardless of their age, to ensure that appropriate treatment is provided as a matter of urgency; and what specific actions are being taken to prevent late diagnosis in the future.

Dear Deputy McGreehan,

The HSE has eight Symptomatic Breast Disease clinics nationally to which GPs can refer patients with possible symptoms of breast cancer, irrespective of their age, for assessment. In 2021, the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) published an evidence-based National Breast Cancer GP Referral Guideline (updated from a previous 2009 referral guideline) to aid GPs in recognising which patients in primary care have symptoms that are suspicious for breast cancer, irrespective of their age. Using an electronic referral form developed in tandem with the guideline, GPs can refer appropriate patients for diagnostic tests in a timely manner and with all the information required for the clinic to triage the patient.

In December 2024, the NCCP published a National Clinical Guideline for the Diagnosis and Staging of Patients with Breast Cancer (updated from a previous 2015 guideline). This guideline provides evidence-based recommendations on which tests should be performed in the symptomatic breast disease clinics to diagnose and stage a patient's breast cancer, and inform their treatment strategy.

The HSE monitors target compliance nationally for timely access to rapid access services, which include the symptomatic breast disease clinics. This measure is one of the National Performance Indicator Suite of metrics outlined in the National Service Plan. Reports of national data for this metric are contained within the Performance Assurance Report (PAR), published on a quarterly basis by the HSE, which monitors HSE service performance against planned activity outlined in the National Service Plan.

Yours sincerely,

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