



Ref: PQ 42779/25

12<sup>th</sup> September 2025

**Deputy Pádraig Rice**  
**Dáil Eireann**  
**Dublin 2**

Dear Deputy Rice

I refer to your parliamentary question below. Firstly, please accept my apologies for the delay in issuing a response.

**PQ 42779/25 – To ask the Minister for Health in respect of offering children paediatric spinal surgeries abroad, the way in which Children's Health Ireland determines suitability; if specific clinical criteria is used; and if she will make a statement on the matter.**

**Children's Health Ireland (CHI) Response:**

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) can advise that families are encouraged to speak to their consultant if they wish to explore this option for their child's treatment. Further information for families can be found here: [Spinal Surgeries Abroad | Children's Health Ireland](#)

Yes, CHI's Spinal Surgery Management Unit uses clinical criteria and other considerations to determine suitability of patients to travel abroad for spinal surgery. There are various criteria that make children suitable or unsuitable for treatment abroad. For example:

**Clinical Suitability:**

Not all patients are medically appropriate for overseas surgery. While "Spinal Fusion" patients may be suitable, "Spinal Other" patients are not suitable, for example. Others may have complex medical needs that preclude safe transfer.

**Family Circumstances:**

Families face difficult choices - factors such as support systems abroad, having other children to care for at home, financial concerns (even if travel is funded), and the need for follow-up care back in Ireland play into these decisions.

**Agreement of consultant:**

The patient's consultant in CHI must agree to take a patient back into their care following surgery abroad by another medical team.

**Children's Health Ireland at Connolly | Crumlin | Tallaght | Temple Street**

**Our Mission** is to: Promote and provide child-centred, research-led and learning informed healthcare, to the highest standards of safety and excellence. We will do this in partnership with each other, with children, young people and their families through a network of children's services in Ireland.

**CRA Registered Charity Number (RCN):** 20202295 **Revenue Charitable Status CHY:** 22235

**Board Members:** Prof James Browne (Chairman), Ms Mary Cryan, Ms Mary Donovan, Ms Catherine Guy, Dr Gavin Lavery, Ms Brigid McManus, Ms Eleanor O'Neill



### **Post-Operative Complications:**

There have been instances of severe complications from overseas surgeries, including prolonged ICU stays. The possibility of such outcomes necessitate thorough case-by-case MDT reviews before any offer is made.

### **Further information:**

The decision-making process regarding spinal surgery, whether at home or abroad, depends on a number of factors. The surgeon will discuss the treatment options with each patient and their family. The natural history of the spinal condition will be explained - i.e. what happens if the problem is not treated. Alternative treatment options are explained, such as observation, the role of physiotherapy, casting, brace management, surgery.

The type of potential surgery will vary depending on the type of scoliosis, the size and location of the curve, the age and maturity of the patient, the amount of growth remaining, the presence of other health conditions (cardiac, respiratory, renal, endocrine, neurological), etc.

Once the treatment strategy has been agreed, the risks, potential side effects and complications of the treatment will be discussed with the patient and their family. The anticipated recovery and rehabilitation programme will also be explained. The patient and their family are then invited to ask questions, which are answered openly and clearly. Only when this engagement has occurred can the patient and their family agree to have spinal surgery.

Where the surgeon has recommended surgery, it is the patient and their family who decide to have spinal surgery.

More information about scoliosis and treatments can be found in CHI's Scoliosis Information Hub: [www.childrenshealthireland.ie/scoliosishub](http://www.childrenshealthireland.ie/scoliosishub).

Yours sincerely

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**Mr. David Moore**

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