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Oifig na Ben O'Sullivan, Príomhoifigeach Feidhmiúcháin
Ospidéal na hOllscoile Port Láirge agus Ospidéal Ortaipéideach na Coille Críne
FSS Phort Láirge agus LochGarman

Office of Ben O'Sullivan Chief Executive Officer
University Hospital Waterford and Kilcreene Regional Orthopaedic Hospital
HSE Waterford Wexford

25th September 2025

Mr Michael Lowry TD
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 48031 - To ask the Minister for Health the steps being taken to ensure clear and consistent governance across ophthalmology emergency referral pathways at UHW; that no patient with suspected acute or sight-threatening pathology is turned away from hospital care and that regional equity is provided in order that patients in Thurles and surrounding areas have timely access to emergency eye services.

Dear Deputy Lowry,

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.

I can advise that the primary catchment area for services at University Hospital Waterford includes the counties of Waterford, Wexford, Carlow/Kilkenny and South Tipperary. The Ophthalmology Service at University Hospital Waterford provides a regional service across these 5 counties. This population contributes to the consistent demand for Ophthalmology Services, with patients being referred to UHW for a wide range of ophthalmic issues

University Hospital Waterford also provides an Emergency Eye Care Service for patients who require urgent attention for injuries to the eye and/or significant changes in vision. In that regard, our dedicated Eye Casualty is open from 8am to 8pm 7 days a week. It is staffed by 2 Nurses, and 2 Junior Doctors with oversight from the on-call Ophthalmic Consultant Surgeon. Patients are referred by GP's, Optometrist's or indeed patients often self refer. Since the Covid Pandemic, the service has been an appointment only service and this system ensures that those patients most in need receive timely appointments. The service receives up to 100 calls per day and sees 30 to 40 patients per day within the 8am to 8pm timeframe. Calls are triaged by the Nursing Team with advice as required from the Ophthalmologists. Inpatients from other hospitals are also frequently transported to UHW for review. The protocol for patients experiencing double vision and cranial nerve palsies is that such patients should be assessed in the main ED setting in the first instance, with Ophthalmic input to follow.

In line with Government policies, discussions are ongoing regarding the delivery of Eye Care Services within Acute Hospitals and Primary Care settings with the aim of improving the quality of the service and expanding access to that service in collaboration with all professionals within Ophthalmology Services

I trust the above is satisfactory but if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Ben O'Sullivan
Chief Executive Officer
University Hospital Waterford Kilcreene
Regional Orthopaedic Hospital