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6th October 2025

Re: PQ 49889/25 - To ask the Minister for Health if she will consider the establishment of a national body with radiotherapy expertise to identify patient and technology specific needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter

Dear Deputy

Thank you for your question and for highlighting the important matter of ensuring radiotherapy/radiation oncology services meet both patient-specific needs and technology-specific needs.

The **National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026** places strong emphasis on planning, modernising and resourcing cancer treatment services to ensure patients across Ireland receive evidence-based, safe, timely, high-quality care. The Strategy includes commitments to modernise radiotherapy services, expand capacity, improve treatment modalities including stereotactic ablative radiotherapy (SABR), and ensure equitable access for patients. It also commits to ensuring that infrastructure, workforce, and technology are sufficient to meet demand. Within this framework:

- The **capital investment** programme under the Strategy has supported state-of-the-art new radiation oncology facilities in Cork and Galway, and a major expansion and upgrading of radiation oncology infrastructure in St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network (SLRON), Dublin.
 - A major Phase II expansion of SLRON's radiotherapy facilities at the Beaumont radiotherapy centre is currently underway.
 - A major equipment replacement programme is in progress at SLRON, to replace all 14 aged linacs (treatment machines) and imaging equipment. This equipment replacement programme is both complex and challenging - construction work on live clinical sites, while maintaining clinical activity, with unplanned downtime (unscheduled equipment breakdown due to age), in three separate locations at St. Luke's Hospital Rathgar, and radiation oncology centres on the St James's Hospital campus and on the Beaumont Hospital campus.
- **Workforce challenges** are recognised. The **National Radiation Therapist Review Report (2024)** recommends measures to strengthen recruitment and retention of radiation therapists, including new advanced practice and aide roles, and a review of grading structures for the radiation therapist profession e.g. seniors and director of radiation therapy.
- The NCCP develop a suite of **National Clinical Guidelines** that integrate the best current evidence with clinical expertise and patient values. These National Clinical Guidelines aim to reduce variation in practice, improve patient outcomes, including their experience of care, and promote the judicious use of resources. The NCCP develop guidelines to ensure practice is up-to-date, evidence-based and in line with international best practice. The following National Clinical Guidelines for cancer have been recently published or are in development and make recommendations in relation to radiotherapy:

- HSE National Clinical Guideline: Treatment of patients with breast cancer (radiation oncology) (2023). This guideline is currently being updated and is scheduled for publication in November 2025. This will be the first NCCP living guideline with evidence being reviewed on a continuous basis.
- HSE National Clinical Guideline: Neoadjuvant treatment of patients with locally advanced rectal cancer (2024). This guideline was developed to address new and emerging evidence and replaces a section of the National Clinical Guideline: Diagnosis, staging and treatment of patients with rectal cancer (2020). It addresses a multimodality treatment approach for this patient cohort, including radiotherapy.
- National Clinical Guideline: Diagnosis, staging and treatment of patients with prostate cancer (2015, updated 2025). This guideline is currently being updated in a modular fashion. (See HSE National Clinical Guideline: Diagnosis and staging of patients with prostate cancer (2022); HSE National Clinical Guideline: Active surveillance for patients with prostate cancer (2025)). The treatment section of this guideline is currently being updated by the NCCP and will include the latest evidence with regards to radiation oncology.
- A link to HSE National Clinical Guidelines can be found here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/profinfo/guidelines/>

Looking forward, the development of the next national cancer and radiotherapy strategy will continue to include radiotherapy experts and patient representatives, and will consider:

- patient-specific needs (cancer types, disease burden, geography) and technology-specific needs (equipment, precision radiotherapy, imaging, planning systems, quality assurance);
- ongoing equipment replacement programmes;
- workforce capacity and training;
- equitable access; and
- integration of research and technological innovation into clinical practice.

In this way, strategic planning will ensure radiotherapy services remain modern, patient-centred, and responsive to evolving clinical and technological requirements.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Bonas
Assistant National Director

