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Re. PQ 39681/22: To ask the Minister for Health the specific details of the way that capacity in the public system will be enhanced to meet projected demands for cancer care, including but not limited to, staffing, infrastructure and access to diagnostics; and if he will make a statement on the matter

Dear Deputy Burke,

The projected demands for cancer care are considered against a number of factors and developments, among which are:

- The projected incidence and prevalence of cancer, by cancer type, age and gender and demographics
- Developments in diagnosis and treatment approaches and capabilities
- Development of streamed pathways for specific cohorts of patients
- New and emerging clinical guidelines
- New and emerging technologies in surgery, systemic therapy and radiotherapy
- New cancer drugs
- Locations for delivery of cancer treatment
- Locations for follow up, surveillance and support – hospital and community
- Outcomes of cancer treatment.

Staffing for cancer services is progressed through the annual Service Planning process.

Framed by the National Cancer Strategy, these positions are directed to initiate, develop and consolidate the delivery of cancer care in cancer centres, other hospitals providing cancer services, and community settings. Collaboration with other programmes, in particular National Clinical Programmes (including Surgery, Radiology and Pathology) supports directing resources at priority areas for action.

The significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and of the cyber-attack, has had to be factored in planning for cancer service maintenance and resilience.

The most recent Service Plans - 2020, 2021 and 2022 - have progressively increased overall staffing for cancer services by over 400 positions. These range across specialist doctors, nurses, pharmacists, health science and diagnostics professionals, therapy professions and administrative roles.

Infrastructure for cancer services is progressed through the annual Capital Planning process.

The expansion of public radiotherapy facilities have been progressed in Cork (complete), Galway (operational in 2023) and at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin (commencing 2022). An equipment replacement programme has been initiated for the other public radiotherapy sites.

Infrastructure, capacity, facilities and equipment for diagnostics - radiology and pathology (imaging centres and laboratories) and surgery (theatres, HDU/ICU) are planned within Acute Hospitals. Infrastructure within Cancer Centre hospitals is incorporated within this planning.

A HSE National Property Asset Management Strategy is in preparation which will encompass the strategic planning for infrastructure renewal and expansion.

Day wards, in-patient wards and aseptic compounding units have been assessed with respect to capacity and current and projected demand. Replacement and expansion projects for a number of sites are included in the HSE Capital Plan 2022. Business cases are in preparation for a number of other sites.

Demand for diagnostics across the health system is growing significantly. Planning to address this increasing demand is underway. Initiatives are being developed to increase capacity and to improve access to diagnostics. Access to diagnostics for cancer patients is a component of the overall system.

Equipment replacement for diagnostics equipment for cancer services is part of the annual programme of renewal. The acquisition of additional and special-purpose equipment to increase capacity and to enhance capability forms part of the annual Capital Planning process.

Yours sincerely



Professor Risteárd Ó Laoide
National Director
National Cancer Control Programme

