

28th February 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I was asked to comment on a Parliamentary Question directed to the Minister for Health on surgery options at the National Gender Service.

Our website www.nationalgenderserviceireland.com has information on the surgical assessment process, sites where surgery is performed, and FAQs on the National Gender Service.

Waiting times at present are unacceptably long at the National Gender Service. At present, people are waiting up to three and a half years for their initial appointment. Further investment and service development is needed to provide a comprehensive service, including provision of surgical services, and to shorten waiting times. Additional autism supports would also be of benefit.

Service development has been ongoing at the National Gender Service over the last five years.

In 2018, additional funding for staff was approved based on an increase in referral rates between 2014 and 2017. A number of new staff were recruited in 2019 following approval of the 2018 business case. A Clinical Governance structure was put in place by the National Gender Service team in 2019 and multiple quality improvement initiatives have been implemented by the staff at the National Gender Service since then.

These developments are ongoing but ongoing service development and provision is threatened by an ongoing increase in demand with insufficient capacity. Since 2018 there has been a further increase in referral rates. Between 2014 and 2018 (when the original business cases were written), the average annual referral rate was approximately 200 per year. It now exceeds 450 per year.

Given the further increase in demand since 2018, the waiting time continues to increase as demand continues to exceed capacity. This has caused significant distress as people are waiting longer and longer for an appointment. Current waiting times are now over three years and will continue to increase in the absence of additional investment. There are over 1500 people on the waiting list.

To reduce waiting times, the National Gender Service has submitted multiple business cases for additional staff and clinical space so that we can offer sufficient capacity to meet the increase in demand. These business cases rest with the HSE Acute Operations Division and the HSE Mental Health Division.

Separately, a surgical business case was prepared to offer public sector gender affirming surgery in Ireland as delivered by a dedicated surgical team within the National Gender Service. This case has not progressed and in the context of the new HSE Programme for Gender Healthcare, via the office of the Chief Clinical Officer at the HSE, will now likely be dealt with in this programme.

At the National Gender Service, we will continue to advocate for service investment and development so that we can fully meet the needs of people referred to us. However, the decision for additional investment is in the hands of senior HSE management.

If the investment we seek is granted, then the National Gender Service will proceed to recruitment and will reduce the waiting list to a matter of months rather than years. If we do not receive additional investment, then waiting times will continue to increase.

I hope the above has been clear and useful.

Yours Sincerely,



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