



Príomhoifigeach Cliniciúil
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Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
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15th April 2024

PQ13263 /24- Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh- To ask the Minister for Health if he is aware of the growing concern at the fact that there appears to be currently inordinate delays in accessing blood tests in public hospitals in some cases nine weeks.

Dear Deputy Ó Snodaigh,

Thank you for your representation.

Public hospital laboratories provide a very wide range of blood tests for hospitals and for GPs and other community-based services. Results of blood tests for GPs are sent to the GP by secure electronic transfer. This means that once the results are ready in the lab they reach the GP much more quickly than was the case in the past when results were sent by mail.

There are routine blood tests such as blood counts and liver function tests and some other much less commonly used tests. For some of the less commonly used tests the sample may be sent to specialised laboratories in Ireland or in other countries. In some cases a laboratory may run a batch of tests once or week or less often if the number of tests is low and it is more efficient to run the samples in a batch. The clinical urgency of test results depends on the clinical circumstances.

Laboratories generally have set targets for the turn-around times from the time the sample reaches the laboratory until the time when the result is reported. Laboratories monitor their performance against those targets. The HSE does not collect and collate data on compliance with turnaround times in individual laboratories as this is managed at the hospital level as part of the laboratory quality management system.

On foot of this question the HSE has asked laboratories if they are achieving their target turn-around-times. Responses have been received from 17 laboratories. Most laboratories that have responded to date (15 of 17) indicate that they are achieving their target turn-around-times. Two laboratories reported delays of days to 3 weeks for some tests for a period earlier this year related to technical problems but these are now largely resolved.

Samples and tests identified to the laboratories as urgent are prioritised when there are delays. The HSE is aware also that delays in turn-around times may occur in other laboratories. These delays are generally related to a high and growing volume of demand and growing range



and growing complexity of tests requested. Responding to this growing demand within existing resources is challenging many hospital-based laboratories.

In most areas of the country the blood sample for testing is taken from patients in the community by their GP or GP practice nursing staff in the GP surgery. The samples are subsequently collected from the GP surgery and taken to the laboratory for testing. Some hospitals, in particular in the Dublin area, have offered patients in the community access to book an appointment to have a blood test taken by the hospital-based phlebotomy service using the Swiftqueue booking system. This provides an alternative to the collection of blood samples in the GP surgery. All laboratories will also accept samples taken in the GP practice and sent to the laboratory.

The HSE does not collect information from hospitals on the interval of time from a referral to phlebotomy service until the sample is taken. However, in response to this question the HSE has asked hospitals for information on this issue. Some hospitals in the Dublin area have indicated that at present the interval from booking an appointment to appointment may be up to 9 weeks in some cases. This is related to a high and growing demand for hospital-based phlebotomy services for patients in the community at a time when the hospital phlebotomy teams are also dealing with intense demand from hospital patients. The hospitals that have offered this service do not receive a budget allocation or designated staff complement to support the expansion of phlebotomy services for the community.

The HSE recognises that there are significant challenges for the provision of laboratory services for hospital and community patients. The HSE is currently developing a strategy for laboratory medicine services. This strategy will address the future provision of phlebotomy services and laboratory analysis services at a national level. In the interim hospitals will continue to prioritise phlebotomy services for those patients where they are aware that taking a sample is likely to be particularly difficult technically for GP practices and where there is identified urgency in sample collection and will continue to work with GPs and other to deliver an efficient laboratory analytical service.

I hope this provides you with some assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharon Hayden'.

Sharon Hayden
General Manager
Office of the Chief Clinical Officer