

15th November 2024

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 43823/24

“To ask the Minister for Health the reason the ophthalmology services in University Hospital Kerry have been shut down; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Danny Healy-Rae

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

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.

The Ophthalmology Service in University Hospital Kerry (UHK) remains fully operational and has not been ceased at any point. There have been changes made to the Out of Hours service at the hospital. The Out of Hours service previously provided by the clinician in UHK is no longer available. However, UHK has implemented an alternative pathway to manage out-of-hours ophthalmology needs, ensuring continued patient support.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CKCH), South, South West Hospital Group (SSWHG) and South Infirmary - Victoria University Hospital (SIVUH) are currently working collaboratively to develop a Regional Eye Care Service based in the new Primary Community Care Centre located in Ballincollig Cork. This new service will provide a designated specialised infrastructure where all community procedures related to Ophthalmology will be performed and incorporate Multidisciplinary Team Working between multiple grades of Ophthalmology staff to deliver the best outcomes for both children and adults. Other Ophthalmology Clinics located in North Cork, West Cork and Kerry will also continue to function in order to support the wide geographic spread across Cork and Kerry.

This proposal is in alignment with the strategic direction and recommendations of the Primary Care Eye Services Review Group report and the Model of Eye Care under the National Clinical Programme (NCP) for Ophthalmology.

Three ophthalmology pathways have been approved to date, each to be delivered utilising community-based Integrated Eye Care Teams. The approved pathways for 2023 are the Cataract Pathway, the Medical Retina Pathway and the Paediatric Eye Pathway, which together will enable the realisation of significant components of the National Model of Care for Ophthalmology.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CKCH) were informed of an initial allocation of funding to commence the development of an integrated eye care service in 2023 and this funding is welcomed in developing the initial phases of the services for Cork and Kerry. A steering group has been convened between CKCH, SSWHG and SIVUH to commence the operationalisation of an integrated eye care service. Recruitment remains a challenge in the area of Ophthalmology but relevant teams will be ensuring that all local, national and international opportunities are explored.

We are pleased to announce that a new Consultant for Paediatric Eye Care will commence in the region by the end of 2024, bringing essential clinical leadership to Multidisciplinary Teams across Cork and Kerry. The work of the Steering Committee will continue to strengthen care pathways between Acute Hospitals and Community Services. Community Ophthalmic Services in Kerry remain operational, supported by a Community Ophthalmic Physician, nursing, and administrative teams.

We recognize the challenges associated with waiting times, particularly for specific ophthalmic conditions, and the HSE Southwest is actively implementing targeted measures to address them. As part of our Modernised Care Pathways, we have already made significant progress in reducing paediatric waiting lists in the Cork region, and we are committed to applying these insights in the Kerry region as resources permit.

With regards to addressing the needs of patients who urgently require ophthalmological care in Kerry, these patients are advised to contact their GP or SouthDoc Out of Hours GP service in the first instance. These patients are then advised by their GP/SouthDoc to attend the Eye Casualty Service in SIVUH. In the event of a patient presenting directly to Emergency Department in UHK, an initial assessment is undertaken and onward referral to the Eye Casualty Service in SIVUH". This alternative pathway ensures that urgent ophthalmologic cases are managed efficiently and minimizes the risk by connecting patients with specialized ophthalmology services in a timely manner.

Yours sincerely,



Tess O'Donovan
Chief Officer

