

Q&A

GP Q&A Corner

Q. How do I refer patients?

A. GPs or consultants can contact the NTPF on Lo-Call 1890 720 820 with a patient's details to check whether they qualify. If they do, the NTPF will contact the patient directly. You will be kept up-to-date on progress at all times

Q. Where does my involvement begin and end?

A. Once you have referred your patient to the NTPF and they have agreed to treatment, you will be asked to send their medical records in confidence to the hospital where treatment is to be given.

You will be kept up-to-date at all times regarding their treatment by an NTPF liaison officer. In advance of the treatment, plans for the follow-up care to take place with the GP or the referring consultant will be put in place. Both of these will be provided with a discharge report.

Q. Will I be informed if one of my patients is referred by a consultant or arranges their referral themselves?

A. Should one of your patients be referred to the NTPF, you will be informed and kept up-to-date throughout the process.

Q. How quickly will they be treated?

A. Once patients have accepted the offer for treatment it is anticipated that they will be admitted to hospital in a number of weeks.

Q. What happens if I choose not to refer my patients?

A. It will not affect their status on the waiting list. However, why delay treatment that can be provided earlier? We would encourage all GPs and consultants to refer their qualifying patients for treatment under the Fund.

Call Lo-Call
1890 720 820
or visit www.ntpf.ie
for further information

Making a difference

NTPF Hospital Liaison Officer

I have worked in Beaumont Hospital for the past six years and last year I was appointed as the NTPF liaison officer there, having previously been involved in the administration of waiting lists at the hospital.

One of things I like most in my work is dealing with people and with this job I spend a lot of time on the phone to the NTPF, patients, consultants and other members of hospital staff.

Every day I am in contact with the NTPF who take calls through the Lo-Call number from patients who believe they are eligible for treatment under the Fund. Some of those patients are on waiting lists in Beaumont Hospital and it's my job to check how long they are on the waiting list to ensure that they are eligible for treatment. Once I've checked the patient's details I call the NTPF and let them know whether the patient is eligible.

If the patient qualifies for treatment I follow-up with the consultants who can carry out the necessary procedures and set a time for the patient's treatment. Most of the consultants I deal with are based in Beaumont but I also deal with consultants who work in other hospitals. Over the last four years I have got to know the consultants and their secretaries very well so I just pick up the phone when I have an enquiry. When I get a date for treatment I contact the patient to confirm it and then arrange for their medical records to be sent to the treating consultant.

A qualifying patient may have indicated that they are willing to be treated in England. If so, I contact one of the four private hospitals in England that the NTPF use. I then give the patient details on their treatment date and the English hospital then



Debbie O'Reilly, NTPF liaison officer, Beaumont Hospital, Dublin

liaises directly with the patient regarding all their travel and treatment arrangements. I keep in contact with the patient who is reassured that I am only a phone-call away if they have any queries.

Essentially my job is to make sure that a patient's treatment goes as smoothly as possible and that they have the information they need at all times. It's very challenging but I get great satisfaction from helping people have operations that can make a huge difference to their quality of life. In fact, just the other day a man who had his cataracts done under the NTPF rang me to let me know that he could now enjoy his favourite hobby, reading. This made me feel really good as if I was making a difference.

Each health board area has a designated NTPF liaison officer. If you would like details of your local liaison officer please contact the NTPF Patient Information Lo-Call number 1890 720 820

Tús maith, leath na hoibre

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), an initiative under the Government's Health Strategy, was established in April 2002 to purchase operations for patients who have been waiting longest on public hospital waiting lists. Our first job was to identify the number of adults and children who, at March 2002, had been waiting for more than twelve and six months respectively for a surgical procedure on a public hospital waiting list. A total of 8,305 patients (6,805 adults and 1,500 children) were identified under this category.

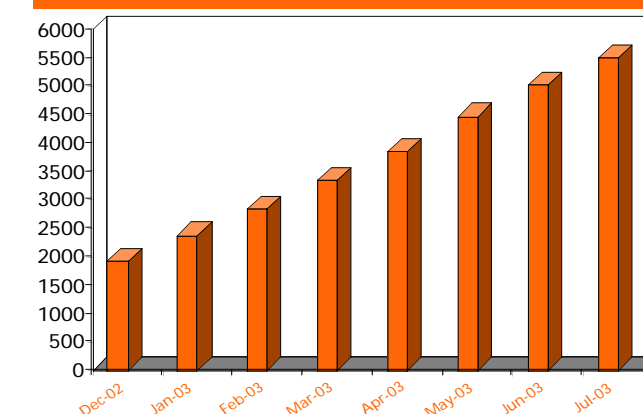
The first operation under the NTPF was carried out in July 2002 and since then almost 5,500 patients have been treated. The NTPF mainly treats patients for procedures such as: cataracts; varicose veins; hernias; gall bladders; prostate; tonsils; adenoids; grommets; plastic surgery; cardiac surgery and hip and knee replacement operations. Spinal surgery and neurosurgery have recently commenced. The NTPF has the capacity each month to treat 500 patients in hospitals throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland and also 200 patients in four private hospitals in England.

In order to raise awareness about the Fund we embarked on a public information campaign that included a patient information booklet, poster, public information meetings, advertising campaign, and more recently, the NTPF website. We also launched a patient information Lo-Call number "1890 720 820" in October 2002 so members of the public could contact us directly to enquire whether they are entitled to treatment under the Fund. Almost 5,000 people have contacted the Lo-Call number, with 800 eligible for treatment.

We have achieved much in treating almost 5,500 patients during our first year. In some areas, hospitals have cleared the patients waiting longest and their waiting times are now reduced for adults and children to six and three months respectively. However, we still have under-utilised capacity in England and by using this we can reach our target by October 2003 of clearing the 8,305 patients identified at March 2002 as the longest waiters. The NTPF works closely with hospitals, health boards, GPs and consultants and wishes to acknowledge all the co-operation on behalf of patients.

Maureen Lynott
Director, NTPF

Patients treated under the National Treatment Purchase Fund to date



"Committed to succeed"



Minister for Health and Children, Micheál Martin T.D. and NTPF Director, Maureen Lynott, pictured at the launch of the NTPF Patient Information Booklet in October 2002.

I am pleased with the work of the Fund and what it has achieved in its first year. Significant inroads have been made into the long waiters as evidenced by the fact that almost 5,500 have been treated by the NTPF to date. The problems associated with waiting lists have been well documented and solutions are required that will make a lasting impact on these lists. The NTPF has been established to focus specifically on the long waiters and offer them treatment mainly in private hospitals. This health initiative is working very successfully and patients are responding very positively as evidenced by the NTPF's first Patient Satisfaction Survey, which was presented to me recently. The NTPF has also launched a website which can be accessed at www.ntpf.ie. I am committed to reducing waiting lists further and eliminating the need for people to wait as they have previously. I will continue to work with the Fund to achieve this goal.

Micheál Martin T.D.
Minister for Health and Children

Patient comments

"I had a great experience. My carers, particularly my surgeon, were excellent"

"I was delighted to get my surgery completed having waited for 8 years"

The National Treatment Purchase Fund is a Government initiative outlined in the Health Strategy and Programme for Government.

The offices are located at 16 Parnell Square East, Dublin 1.

Patient Information Lo-Call number: 1890 720 820

Website: www.ntpf.ie

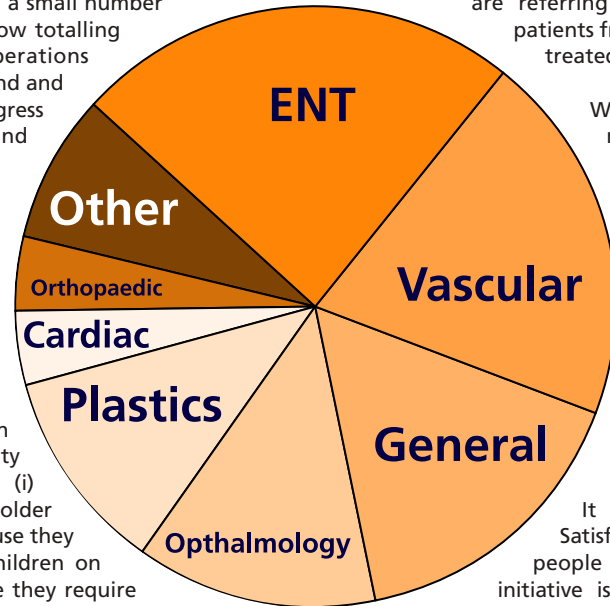
Procedures and treatments

It is now a little over a year since the first patient was treated under the NTPF initiative. Since then almost 5,500 patients have received their operations. From a small number initially, the monthly referrals are now totalling approximately 600 between operations carried out in Ireland, Northern Ireland and England. However, despite the progress on the waiting lists, capacity in England is still underutilised.

The Fund is there to deal with public patients who have been longest on in-patient waiting lists in our public hospitals. These patients have been waiting because of the pressures we hear about in the acute hospital system. While many of the conditions are not life-threatening, they, nevertheless, affect people in fulfilling their everyday lives. Quality of life issues concern people who (i) cannot read because of cataracts, (ii) older people with restricted mobility because they need a hip replacement and (iii) children on antibiotics or missing school because they require an ENT operation such as tonsils, adenoids or grommets. The Fund is there to deal with these cases and many more. The distribution of cases treated is set out in the chart.

The NTPF initially concentrated on adults who had been waiting over twelve months and children over six months. Where these targets have been achieved by health boards or hospitals, adults

and children now waiting over six or three months respectively are being treated under the Fund. All health board areas are referring patients under this initiative and patients from all parts of the country have been treated.



With any new initiative, people naturally will have reservations and questions will arise. The Fund and its medical advisors have put in place protocols to ensure that the best treatment is provided to patients. Where treatment abroad is chosen, a travelling companion can accompany the patient and travelling costs are covered by the Fund. People's medical card entitlements are not affected if they opt for NTPF treatment; the treatment is free.

It can be seen from the Patient Satisfaction Survey and also from the 5,500 people who have been treated that this initiative is up-and-running and working well. People can access the Fund on their own behalf or on behalf of a relative or friend by contacting the NTPF on its Lo-Call number 1890 720 820, contacting their general practitioner, consultant or local NTPF hospital liaison officer.

Patrick O'Byrne
Chief Executive, NTPF

Very satisfactory results

The NTPF is focused on providing patient-centred services that will lead to quality assurance at all stages of a patient's treatment from initial contact through to post-operative care. As part of its ongoing monitoring of the care provided under the Fund a total of 620 questionnaires were sent to patients treated under the scheme. The main findings of the survey were:

- 96% reported that the treatment they received was good to excellent;
- 93% would recommend treatment under the Fund to a friend or relative;
- 52% of patients were treated within two to four weeks of being contacted by the NTPF;
- 75% of patients were treated within two months of being contacted by the NTPF;
- 93% indicated satisfaction with the treatment timeframe;
- 80% of patients were happy with post-operative/discharge instructions.

It was particularly pleasing for the NTPF that two thirds of those sent a survey responded, which is a very high percentage for primary research. It shows the level of interest in the service is high, and enables the Fund to continue to improve the service it provides to patients.



Patient comments

"Everyone I came in touch with treated me with the utmost care and friendliness. I have no complaints at all. Excellent"

"I travelled to England for my hernia operation, and it couldn't have been easier. The NTPF ensured all my treatment needs were catered for from start to finish"

Delia's story

Delia O'Connell, 72 years old, from Nenagh in County Tipperary had cataract operations on both her eyes under the NTPF. Delia talks about her experience:



My eyesight was in a terrible state and I badly needed cataract operations in both my eyes. I was told last May that I would have to wait for months because the waiting list was choc-a-bloc. Then the Mid-Western Health Board rang me from Limerick and asked whether I was interested in having my eyes done in Tralee under a scheme called the NTPF. I was thrilled to get the offer of treatment in November and I told them I would go.

I went for the operation on a Tuesday and was home the following Thursday. They sorted out transport for me to be taken to Tralee and looked after everything. My second eye was operated on in February and now I have 20/20 vision. Had it not been for the NTPF I would have had to wait much longer.

It is important that other people in a similar position as myself know about the NTPF. I have since heard the NTPF Lo-Call number advertised on Tipp FM. I definitely encourage people to get treatment under the National Treatment Purchase Fund. Why should people suffer if it is there for them?

My local paper, The Nenagh Guardian, interviewed me about my treatment. I was delighted to be able to see my photo in the newspaper and read the story. That's the difference that the operation has made to my life.

Stephen's story

Stephen Moloney from Artane in Dublin was treated for a hernia repair under the NTPF in the BUPA Murrayfield Hospital near Manchester. Stephen tells his story below:



I was a patient at Beaumont Hospital in Dublin and was waiting for over two years to have a hernia operation. My wife Margaret heard an advertisement for the NTPF on the radio one afternoon while I was at work. She knew that I had been waiting for a long time so she rang the Lo-Call telephone number that was advertised to find out if I could be treated this way.

I was offered treatment in the BUPA Murrayfield Hospital which is near Manchester in England. I was really happy to find out that I could be treated within a few weeks with the NTPF. I didn't mind having to travel to England for treatment, as otherwise I could have been waiting for at least another year.

All the arrangements were made for me. I was brought from my home to Dublin Airport on a Tuesday morning at the start of February and was flown to Manchester where I was met by a hospital representative and transferred to BUPA Murrayfield. They admitted me that afternoon and my operation took place the following morning. The surgeon allowed me to go home that Thursday afternoon. The hospital arranged for me to be brought to Manchester Airport and I returned to Dublin in the evening. Margaret was told that the NTPF makes arrangements for a travelling companion to go with a patient who is travelling abroad for treatment. Margaret came with me and stayed in a hotel near the hospital. It was great that she could visit me during the day.

RTE was interested in my story of going abroad for treatment so a camera crew came with me. They showed my journey on the evening news. Hopefully other people on waiting lists who saw how simple and straightforward it all was will ring the NTPF to see if they can get treated quickly.

I couldn't believe how hassle-free the trip and treatment was. If my wife hadn't picked up the phone and called the Lo-Call number I would probably still be waiting for treatment. I am now back at work and I don't know myself. The operation has made an enormous improvement to my quality of life.

Patient comments

"I heard the ad on the radio, phoned the Lo-Call number and had my treatment in a couple of weeks"

"I would encourage other people to avail of this wonderful opportunity to have their surgery needs catered for"