

Pensioner is 150,000th patient on NTPF list

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A 84-YEAR-OLD pensioner from Co Offaly has become the 150,000th patient to be treated through the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF).

John, known as Séan, Keegan from Ballydrohid, Tullamore, Co Offaly, had been told that he would have to wait at least six months for prostate surgery though he was in a lot of pain.

Mr Keegan, who is cared for by his nephews and nieces, was diagnosed with an enlarged prostate in March and told he would need a transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP), the most common procedure for such a condition.

His niece-in-law Bridget Keegan said she contacted the NTPF after his family was told in May that he would have to wait until next year for an operation. The NTPF recommendation came from staff at St James's Hospital where he was being treated.

Mr Keegan was operated on at St Francis Hospital near Mullingar.

Ms Keegan said: "They could not have been better. They were very approachable. Only for them he would still, in all likelihood, be waiting for surgery. He could still be agony."

NTPF chief executive Pat O'Byrne said the fund hoped to treat 30,000 patients this year.

"Behind all the statistics of the fund is a wealth of human stories. They are all public patients who had been waiting too long for operations, unable for whatever reason to access the system in a timely manner," he said.

The NTPF has been running since 2002 and has been criticised by those who believe it amounts to a subsidy for private medicine in the State.

However, a recent study by the Comptroller and Auditor General found that treatments purchased under the NTPF

were cheaper in general than those carried out in public hospitals.

Consultant oncologist Prof John Crown, a critic of the NTPF, said he was pleased for Mr Keegan, but the need for the fund was an "awful shame".

"They are trying to cover the gaping wound of our failing health system with a band aid called the National Treatment Purchase Fund instead of trying to fix the system in the first place. It is an acknowledgement of failure."