

**REPLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE
TO QUESTIONS POSED BY DEPUTY ST PIER PURSUANT TO RULE 14 OF THE
RULES OF PROCEDURE**

Following recent reports that, as at 31st October 2022, 66% of those on the gastroenterology outpatient waiting list and 89% of those on the gastroenterology inpatient waiting list have been waiting more than the eight weeks anticipated under the secondary healthcare contract with the Medical Specialist Group, can the Committee advise:

1. Whether, and if so how, the number of gastroenterology referrals has changed since before the Covid pandemic?

Table 1 below demonstrates the number of inpatients and outpatients that were on the waiting list for appointments/procedures on key dates since March 2020.

Please note that follow-up patients are not included in these figures.

Table 1: Inpatient and Outpatient waiting list in gastroenterology

	01.03.2020	01.01.2021	01.11.2022
Inpatients	185	378	423
Outpatients	170	203	422

For inpatients, the highest quarterly number of patients waiting was 492, at the end of the first year of the pandemic, on 31st March 2021.

The number of referrals received over the previous three years is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of referrals (2019 – 2022 to date)

	2019	2020	2021	2022 to Date
Inpatients	1192	1162	1145	734
Outpatients	1318	1376	1508	1220

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions are the reason behind the big increase in the waiting list during the first year of the pandemic. As was the case in other jurisdictions, for quite some time it was only possible to book urgent endoscopy procedures because they were classified as aerosol generating procedures and presented a risk of infection to patients and staff that had to be carefully managed. The number of patients booked during the first year of the pandemic were also considerably reduced but

rebounded as patients felt safer to attend health and care environments as the vaccination programme rolled out. The Medical Specialist Group (MSG) also restricted the numbers of outpatients seen at times during the pandemic in line with States of Guernsey guidelines.

Since this time, recruitment challenges in this field, which are mirrored nationally and internationally, have impacted the ability to recruit the staff needed to tackle the waiting lists for endoscopy.

2. What steps, if any, the Committee is taking to use off-island providers to help clear the waiting list?

HSC and the MSG identified the need to introduce a Waiting List Initiative using off-island providers in April 2022, but this has been challenging to implement with NHS Trusts chasing the same providers. It is expected that the Waiting List Initiative will be implemented in Q1 2023 once the States' formal processes have been completed.

A Waiting list initiative is required for significant inroads to be made in the number of people waiting. The routine service is designed for routine turnover and is not staffed to deal with a large and unexpected backlog arising from the pandemic. Longer-term demographic changes will put further pressure on the system, as endoscopic procedures are required more often in the elderly. This will be factored into longer-term planning.

3. What action, if any, the Committee is taking under the contract to hold the Medical Specialist Group to account for the delivery of its contractual commitments?

As is required by the Secondary Healthcare Contract, MSG have ensured that Health & Social Care is fully informed about their efforts to resolve the recruitment issues in gastroenterology to address current challenges. These are not unique to our operating context but are a national challenge for UK NHS providers too. Contract performance is reviewed by the HSC Client Team on a monthly basis; a dedicated team which has been in place since 2017 to manage such arrangements.

The Committee is assured that appropriate steps would be taken if the MSG was not seen to make the reasonable efforts to address the situation. For example, the Client Team could issue a Contract Performance Notice which would then be followed by a remedial action plan. To date, it has not been necessary to issue such a Notice.

It is important to note that the MSG have maintained, using locums, the sessional commitment that would be provided by a full-time gastroenterologist during 2022.

Date of receipt of questions: 15th November 2022

Date of response: 9th December 2022