

Press Release
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DELAYS STILL UNACCEPTABLE IN CHILDRENS' ORTHOPAEDIC SURGERY

PROLONGED WAITING TIMES LEAD TO INCREASED COSTS OF 15-30%

MORE SURGEONS AND OPERATING TIME NEEDED say top Paediatric Surgeons

STRAIGHT AHEAD CHARITY MARKS 26 PROCEDURES IN 2.5 YEARS WITH 12 MORE PLANNED FOR 2014

Children who need urgent spinal surgery to correct scoliosis (curvature of the spine) are still waiting up to 18 months for surgery and this is unacceptably dangerous and costly, according to top Paediatric Spinal Surgeons.

The delay may cause increased deformity in the growing child, leading to more complex and difficult surgeries, increased blood transfusion requirements and longer recovery times.

New research¹ indicates a 15-30% increased cost associated with surgically correcting the more severe curves (>70°) on waiting lists. This means that 15-30% more surgeries could be performed every year if waiting lists for paediatric spinal surgeries were eradicated.

The delays are due to a lack of paediatric surgeons and available surgery time. Ireland has the equivalent of 5½ full-time (wte) paediatric surgeons and the requirement is for 20 part-time (or 10 wte)².

“Waiting lists have decreased from 3 years to around 18 months. However, this is still too long,” said Mr Patrick Kiely, Consultant Orthopaedic Paediatric Orthopaedic & Spinal Surgeon and Founding Surgeon, of Straight Ahead.

¹ Kiely P, Tarrant R, (2014) Impact of Preoperative Scoliosis Deformity Severity (>70° vs. <70°) on Outcomes in Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis after Posterior Spinal Fusion. Funded by the National Children's Research Centre.

² Source: The Irish Institute of Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgery

He continued: “In the public health system, the Paediatric Surgery team has increased its output year on year, and yet we are still not able to get to patients fast enough due to a lack of manpower and theatre access”.

Mr David Moore, Consultant Orthopaedic Paediatric Orthopaedic & Spinal Surgeon and Founding Surgeon, Straight Ahead said: “Operating on a child who has been subject to unnecessary delays between diagnosis and surgery is like walking a precipice. Research shows that when a child’s surgery is delayed until they hit a 70° curvature and above (known as a severe preoperative curve) they are subject to a longer surgery, greater intraoperative blood loss, more fused vertebrae, double the blood transfusion risk and a 40% longer recovery time”.

Delays in other areas of paediatric orthopaedic surgery, such as hip, knee and foot and ankle surgery also lead to increased case-complexity, scale and costs of treatment. Delay in these surgeries has significant impact on children in terms of chronic pain and mobility.

Today, Straight Ahead is hosting a lunch in Croke Park for the children who have received a Straight Ahead procedure, their family, the staff who have worked pro bono for the organisation, donors and fundraisers.

The entire cost of the lunch and associated activity is sponsored by medical devices companies, Medtronic, PEI and Tekno Surgical who have also generously donated implants to Straight Ahead in the last three years.

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About Straight Ahead:

Founded in September 2011, Straight Ahead is an Irish medical and charity supported initiative, which performs major orthopaedic operations for children on HSE waiting lists and in urgent need of surgery. These children have progressive spinal deformity, neuromuscular conditions or orthopaedic conditions that deteriorate the longer they are forced to wait.

While many children with these problems receive surgical treatment every year, some cannot be operated on quickly enough, due to lack of medical resources or theatre time available to the surgical teams.

Today in Ireland, at least 50 young people and children who have severe orthopaedic conditions are awaiting surgery.

Since 2011, Straight Ahead has taken the 26 children who are most at risk of damage due to prolonged waiting lists and provided pro bono surgeries. It is the organisation's aim to provide 12 similar surgeries in 2014.

Straight Ahead operates on an entirely voluntary basis. Surgeons perform the operations pro-bono. The Chairman and Board of the charity give their time and expertise for free. Fundraisers and organisers of community events give selflessly of their time and efforts. Medical Devices Firms PEI, Medtronic, Tekno Surgical, Depuy-Synthes, K2M and Murray Surgical have all provided implants worth €200K. Working together, Straight Ahead is changing the lives of children who would otherwise have to wait for surgery.