

Why are we waiting?

Children left on HSE lists for spinal surgery for two years or more

By **Petrina Vousden**
Health Editor

CHILDREN are waiting more than two years to get life-changing spinal surgery – despite a promise to eliminate the delays.

Close to 50 children who suffer from scoliosis – a painful curvature of the spine – have had to deal with their condition worsening while waiting between a year and two years to access care.

One support group leader has called the delays a ‘disgrace’ while a leading surgeon wants all scoliosis surgeries to be carried out in a single hospital to streamline the process and cut waiting times.

Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital in Crumlin, Dublin, has confirmed there are now 162 children awaiting surgery despite a HSE supported initiative in 2009 to clear the child scoliosis waiting list across the three Dublin children’s hospitals.

Some 47 children have been waiting between a year and two years

THE Straight Ahead charity was founded by Pat Kiely, Paula Kelly and David Moore to try to battle children’s waiting lists for surgery.

In their own time they perform major orthopaedic operations.

Children treated by Straight Ahead have either progressive spinal deformity, neuromuscular conditions or orthopaedic conditions. The charity is able to reduce the cost of surgeries through the provision of free medical care and surgical implants from medical firms.

So far Straight Ahead has provided treatment for 42 children who were on public waiting lists.

while two children have been waiting more than two years for the life enhancing surgery, which in some severe cases can be life-saving.

Gary Farrell, who founded support group Scoliosis Ireland, said the waiting times being endured by children are ‘unbelievable’.

Mr Farrell said the idea that any child would have to wait for more than two years is ‘disgraceful’.

‘Children are suffering and curves can quickly progress. If a curve does progress then this can lead to extra costs and longer recovery time so it makes perfect sense to treat these children sooner rather than later.’

‘Some of their children are waiting on surgery for unacceptable periods and it’s quite upsetting. We need to get this sorted,’ he said.

Crumlin hospital – the country’s largest spinal surgery centre for children – would have to double the number of such surgeries it carries out to meet demand.

Orthopaedic surgeon Pat Kiely said 200 paediatric spinal deformity surgeries should be carried out in Ireland every year. But at the moment only 60 are carried out at Crumlin. ‘It would need to be doing 100 to 120 cases a year to match the demand,’ Mr Kiely said.

Other hospitals where the complex

MY CHILD IS GETTING WORSE AND CAN'T WAIT ANY MORE



Waiting for surgery: Tracey Stynes and daughter Grace yesterday

surgery is carried out are also experiencing delays. Galway University Hospital confirmed there are nine patients awaiting scoliosis surgery. Three patients are adults and six are youngsters aged between 12 and 17. The current maximum wait time is 19 months.

Temple Street Children’s Hospital did not confirm its waiting list for scoliosis surgery. Just 22 children with scoliosis had spine straightening surgery there last year.

Children with scoliosis are on lists despite the delay possibly causing increased deformity in the growing child, leading to more complex surgeries and longer recovery times.

Mr Kiely said ideally spinal deformity surgery for children should be centralised in one hospital. He said it was a ‘complex surgery’ and a specialised area. He said: ‘You cannot

have multiple centres doing small amounts very efficiently. We need one centre, with one theatre dedicated for spinal deformity surgery. If that was running five days a week then that would look after the needs of the population.’

He added there have been waiting list issues for children trying to access the specialist surgery for

‘We need one centre’

between five and ten years.

Any delay in treatment has a serious and negative effect on the patient. It causes considerable pain and impacts the function of the child’s internal organs.

category. We need to prioritise this surgery and we will need a CT scan to be ready in the run up to surgery. The CT should include 3D remodelling and we

and she was listed a long time ago. Unfortunately there has been quite a degree of deterioration since she was listed for surgery. In fact looking at my notes on the situation more than a year ago, the change and magnitude of the situation is alarming.

I have requested extra resources and extra theatre time to try and deal with the complex patients in need of urgent surgery. I am still waiting for news on this. The situation needs to be addressed urgently.

Plea: Excerpts of the letter from Grace’s surgeon to her GP

JUST fix me – that is the message from Grace Stynes to Leo Varadkar and HSE chiefs.

The 11-year-old scoliosis patient has been on a waiting list at Crumlin since October 2013.

The curve in her spine is getting worse. When she was diagnosed in May 2013 the curvature on her spine measured 48 degrees – now it is 79 degrees.

She needs a complex day-long surgery to insert rods to straighten her spine but is still waiting for a date.

Her mother, Tracey, said: ‘She just wants to be fixed. She is in pain every day. Painkillers are not working. She is in constant discomfort. She gets very irritable and she’s frustrated.’

Grace was referred to Crumlin Hospital in December 2012. She got to see a consultant ‘rela-

tively quickly’ and was diagnosed in May 2013.

Her consultant, Mr Pat Kiely wrote to her GP in June last year about the case.

In the letter, he said: ‘Unfortunately there has been quite a degree of deterioration since she was listed for surgery. Looking at my notes on the situation more than a year ago, the change and magnitude of the situation is alarming.’

‘I have requested resources and extra theatre time to try to deal with the complex patients in need of urgent surgery. I am still waiting for news on this. The situation needs to be addressed urgently.’

Mr Kiely also sent the letter to the chairman of Crumlin’s medical board, the hospital chief executive and its clinical director.

waiting list. ‘It was an issue he identified early after the reshuffle as having the potential for improvements to be made,’ he said.

Crumlin Hospital said: ‘There has been a commitment from the HSE in relation to additional funding for paediatric spinal surgery for 2015.’

‘Our Lady’s Children’s Hospital Crumlin are in ongoing discussions with the Department of Health, HSE and children’s hospital group.’

The HSE said: ‘A comprehensive solution is being put in place in 2015 to maximise the use of the available orthopaedic capacity including workforce, beds and theatres across the children’s hospitals, Cappagh Hospital and Tallaght Hospital to increase the numbers of scoliosis surgeries undertaken.’

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Ukraine truce rocked as bomb kills two at city rally

THE fragile truce in Ukraine was rocked yesterday when a bomb killed two people and injured a dozen at a rally.

A policeman was among the dead when the device exploded at a march in Kharkiv to mark the first anniversary of the ousting of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich.

Four suspects were held following what the government called a ‘terrorist act’ 200km from the frontline – fuelling fears that the fighting between state troops and separatist rebels in the east is spreading.

Amateur footage taken in Ukraine’s second

Irish Daily Mail Reporter

city showed hundreds of marchers shouting ‘Glory to the heroes’ when a device, thought to be hidden in snow, detonated.

The demonstrators, including a woman pushing a pram, fled in panic, leaving behind the wounded and dead.

Ukraine president Petro Poroshenko said after on Facebook: ‘This is a brazen attempt to expand the territory of terrorism.’

Security officials say the suspects were pro-

Russian rebels who were trained and equipped by Moscow and were planning a series of attacks in the city. Police also arrested a ‘spy’ in the port of Odessa, defusing a bomb and seizing a haul of grenades.

Meanwhile clashes continued yesterday despite the peace deal brokered ten days earlier with European leaders.

Ukraine say the rebels continued with attacks near Mariupol and were being re-supplied with convoys of equipment, including tanks, from Russia.

However, separatist forces insist they are

preparing to pull back from tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Russian bombers flying in Irish and British airspace risk causing a mid-air collision with a holiday airliner, a former head of the Royal Air Force said last night.

Jock Stirrup warned that Moscow is playing a dangerous game of ‘chicken’ by sending aircraft on sorties. As the Russians become more aggressive, there was ‘no doubt’ of the growing risk of a ‘disaster in the skies’, he said.

Mr Stirrup added: ‘So we are seeing the possibility of mid-air collision... between Russian aircraft and civilian aircraft, increasing.’