

Record of meeting between the Minister for Health, Secretary for the Department Health (State Controller Health) and the Acting Chief Health Officer

3 February 2022

Minister for Health: The Hon. Martin Foley
Acting Chief Health Officer: Professor Ben Cowie
Secretary for Department of Health: Professor Euan Wallace
Deputy Secretary, Public Health Policy and Strategy: Nicole Brady

Re: Amendments to Pandemic Orders - elective surgery

Secretary for Department of Health (State Controller Health): Minister as you are aware, we have had a number of discussions regarding the planning across the health system. Today we have 752 admissions, 71 patients in ICU and 51 ventilated. That number is still higher than when we switched elective surgery off in response to the Omicron wave.

It is my advice that we should maintain some restrictions on elective surgery to ensure we have adequate capacity in the health system and particularly in public hospitals but it is appropriate that from Monday we can switch back on day surgery in our private hospitals to 50% of normal activity. The reason we are starting with day procedures is that these can be switched on and off very quickly, whereas multi day surgery takes more time due to the preparation required.

Minister Foley: While I will conduct further consultation with key groups over today and tomorrow, I need to be assured by the public health team and Acting Chief Health Officer Professor Ben Cowie about whether there are any implications for public health in the plan suggested by the State Controller Health.

Acting Chief Health Officer Professor Ben Cowie: Essentially this is a health services capacity decision. I do recognise the significant impact on broad public health that the restrictions on elective surgery pose. Moving to a more nuanced approach regarding elective surgery, without compromising the COVID response, would seem to be a rational response and a good way forward and I have no concerns that it will impact on the public health response to COVID-19.

Minister Foley: Thank you, I will take that into my consideration. I have arranged a number of other consultations over today and tomorrow to further assist me and when that is done I look forward to finalising the Orders.

- Meeting ended -